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A Sickness the Budget Cannot Cure

Budgets these days, especially in the more developed countries, are less instruments of policy than they are occasions to review the direction that policy is taking. So the most relevant long-run consideration of Mr Healey's strategy this week is the forecast that our present road will culminate in 4.6 million people being unemployed by 1990. There must be many a Treasury official and government spokesman who wishes that this prediction could be written off as emanating from notorious alarmists. Unfortunately, the Cambridge Economic Policy Group has, over the past five or six years, proved itself not so much alarmist as alarmingly right. It correctly foresaw the collapse of the 1972-73 Barber boom, even as the Treasury was issuing emollient noises. It cautioned against the rise of the unemployment figures to above 1.4 million, when ministers were saying such a figure was unlikely and unacceptable, and it anticipated our present recession at a time when the Government was claiming that public expenditure cuts were needed to 'make room' for an economic miracle.

So we must start to consider the implications of four and a half million jobless, before statistics become individuals. The implications are fairly stark, and those for social cost are especially so. The politicians are, in theory anyway, fairly well seized of the results of unemployment in Belfast, say, or Brixton. No fete-opening or party political broadcast is complete without some reference to the tragedy of unemployed school-leavers, and the resentments which accumulate among people who have never been in work are well known too. But who has calculated the actual money cost and its corollaries? At the level of unemployment which seems to be looming by 1990, there would be at a conservative estimate at least six to seven million people dependent on supplementary benefits. Apart from the staggering expenditure this would require, it would mean accepting an almost permanent under-class in British society, one which might appal even the most unreconstructed Friedmanite. (See p. 460 of this issue.)

The very unanimity of the Fleet Street response to the Cambridge argument is ominous. All of the comments concentrated on the recommendations of the report, and although none of them cared to challenge the argument and the evidence, all of them felt strong enough to ridicule the remedy, which was for across-the-board import controls. The *Economist* brooded about the dangers of retaliation. Both *Telegraphs* intoned about industrial sloth. The *Guardian* struck an original note by warning of Comecon collectivism and its adverse effects on consumer sovereignty. This was depressing and stale enough in itself, but more worrying still was the absence of any alternative policy, apart from the orthodoxy which has led to this present pass. It is certainly true that some arguments for import controls come from quarters of inefficient special interest, but this does not condemn the whole case.

The Cambridge analysis is at bottom a relatively simple one. For the last quarter of this century, Britain's industrial rivals have been allowed more and more of their own way. They have gained ground in Britain as British manufacturers have lost it abroad. Imports grew twice as fast as exports in the twenty years up to 1973, and since then the balance of payments has only recovered under the impact of savage deflation and the coming on shore of North Sea oil. If orthodox policies are followed, unemployment can only be alleviated by reflation, but owing to the torpor of British industry, much of the newly generated spending power would be spent on foreign goods. So the Chancellor is in a position where unemployment is effectively outside his determination. So the economy will remain sluggish, with manufacturers lacking incentive to invest and modernise, and workers refusing to co-operate in reducing overmanning. So foreign manufacturers can maintain their competitive edge, and the next world recession will find Britain even more vulnerable. Which means that the deflation purge has to be applied again. And so on.

At the root of the matter is the need for a policy that will reduce the propensity to import, and thus will raise income for investment. Nobody but a fool pretends that

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import restrictions are the sole answer, or that there is anything inherently radical or socialist about them. But they may be a necessary, if not a sufficient condition for finding an answer to the problems of industrial performance, and preventing that impoverishment which could make socialism an undreamt-of contingency. Cambridge does not call for the special-pleading protectionism demanded by neanderthal management and unions, but it does point out that a buoyant home market is one possible incubator for industrial recovery. We have indirect import controls as it is – determined by our relative poverty. Non-selective controls might at least give us a better version of that imperfect world. And the report calculates that, if the growth of imports can be confined to eight per cent per annum, this would still enable us to buy two-and-a-half times more German cars and Japanese electronics in 1990 as we do today. Whereas, on the other projection, there would be millions of our fellow-citizens who would be unable to contemplate buying anything except necessities.

It is a powerful case, and more powerful than most of the objections to it which have so far been deployed against it. GATT and the EEC would have to be squared, but treaties of that sort are surely capable of evolution, and our trading partners do have an interest in British industrial recovery as a market for their own goods. Action of the kind suggested by the Cambridge Group would be drastic, but it begins to look a sight preferable to sitting back and watching one thousand new recruits to the dole queue every day on average through the nineteen eighties. The Chancellor needs to lift his gaze from his modest tax-cuts and half-hearted reflation, and start thinking about measures to stop the country's industrial topsoil blowing clean away.

Notes on Politics and Power

The Rewards of being a Euro-MP

'Grossly undervalued' is how Lord Boyle's Top Salaries Review Body last week described the work of our Westminster MPs, in reference to their pay of £6,300. However, it is hard to be as sympathetic to 36 British delegates, (including ten peers) who travel so frequently to the consultative European Assembly. The motivation of their diligence (much noted by their European colleagues) may be liberal allowances granted them by the European Commission. One Westminster MP guesses that some of his colleagues who were representatives to the Assembly could be pocketing over £3,000 a year surplus for their pains. And yet no European MP actually receives any salary for the job. It is all done on expenses.

The expenses have three main constituents; it is possible to make a profit on all three. For each day of attendance a European MP may claim a subsistence allowance of just over £50 (figures fluctuate marginally according to the level of the European unit of account). Most British European MPs go to the Continent on a rough average of 14 days a month to attend committee, Assembly and political group meetings, but it is possible to attend many more of the 20 monthly working days by volunteering to fill in for colleagues on committee. Given the junketing that goes on, it is quite a hard task to eat, drink and sleep your way through £50 a day. Furthermore, it's possible to sign the register of the Assembly and then simply head for home.

The second constituent is the secretarial allowance. This is set at a minimum of £88 per month, but if an MP signs a contract with a secretary and files it with the Assembly, he receives over £4,200 a year. Reasonably enough, the MP can then employ the secretarial skills of his wife.

Travel expenses, however, probably provide the best source of income. This allowance is calculated on the basis of a distance of half-way between the MP's hometown and national parliament, and the distance between their national parliament and the place of meeting. For their first 400 kilometres MPs receive 23p for every kilometre (£92) and after that 9p a kilometre. The distance from Strasbourg to London and back is 1,330 kilometres.

The first class return air fare is £185. If you fly second class you save a further £62. In fact, in the past, MPs have been chartering a plane at a small discount off that. The ingenious MP who lives outside London, can claim further expenses for half the distance of his trip from his home to his national parliament at first class air fare rates when in fact that trip either didn't happen as he was already in London anyway, or was travelled by train in which case the fare is then paid for by the Government when Westminster is in session.

Hair shirt socialism, maybe, but little wonder the Inland Revenue is beginning to devote some thought to the matter.

Fort Steak-House

Heirs apparent to the ailing Grunwick's strike have been frequent, but both sides of the ten-week old dispute at Garner's Steak Houses look like being the first to justify the mantle. The head of Garners, Cyril Margolis, has promised to be the 'George Ward of catering'.

Like Grunwick, Garners is a small tight-knit family business running a chain of restaurants in the West End: for the unions it could provide an entry into a potentially rich area. Union density among the 800,000 workers in the hotel and catering industry, according to the Bullock Report, is only a little over 5 per cent.

Ninety-odd of a mainly immigrant staff of 160 staged a demonstration outside the company's office on 26 January calling for recognition of their union, the Transport and General Workers' Union. They said 80 per cent of the staff were union members. The next day they were sacked, whereon 120 people walked out and started picketing. A waiter received £26 for a 40 hour week. With 14 hours compulsory overtime he ended up with £39 on his pay slip and £30.44 take-home pay. However, since the strike began senior managers' pay has been increased by £7 and all members of the company now receive £5 a week taxi money for late work.

Margolis will have nothing to do with ACAS, which thus remains largely powerless until new legislation is passed. But the strike committee say the picketing is biting and that takings are down by two-thirds. Still £6 a week strike pay hardly keeps morale high. Already one married striker Mahmet Hassein, having fallen behind with his rent, is now homeless. All we need now is John Gouriet.

Oil Going West

After the rather contrived excitement about what to do or not do with the North Sea oil money – of which we turn out to have not so much after all – it's worth noticing what is happening to the oil itself.

The biggest single export destination is the United States, and the Department of Energy now estimates that this came to three million tons in the second half of 1977. Therefore the US took fifteen per cent of the North Sea output: more than half the amount going to Western Europe and Scandinavia together.

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Patrick Wintour: A Star Chamber for the Red Mole of Cowley

British Leyland's plans for massive new investment largely depend on the proposition that 'militant moderate' union officials can destroy the Trotskyite power-base in the vital Cowley plant. But the methods being applied are ruthless, and may well worsen the long-term situation.

Amid much secrecy, the regional officers of the Transport and General Workers Union have brought disciplinary proceedings against twelve of their members who work for British Leyland at Cowley. The local district committee has already subjected the men to a set of hearings in camera, and the regional inquiry committee, having spent some days in Oxford, will probably report this month.

The district committee's recommendations – so far as discoverable – include tickings-off, fines, indefinite bans from holding union office, and in the case of at least one man, expulsion from the union. If the regional committee concurs, the man will lose his job, though he can appeal to the T&G executive. This man is Alan Thornett, a transport driver at the assembly plant, elected a deputy senior steward last December, founder member of the Workers' Socialist League, and known to newspaper readers as 'The Mole'.

The complaints against the Mole and his colleagues arise from a mass meeting last summer, which turned into a physical conflict: the victims, in their own view at least, being the local T&G official David Buckle and his chief in-plant ally, Reg Parsons. 'The Cowley Twelve' are accused of publicly criticising members of the union, publishing secret documents about branch finances, and leaving a district committee meeting without permission – all of which may be treated as offences in the T&G book.

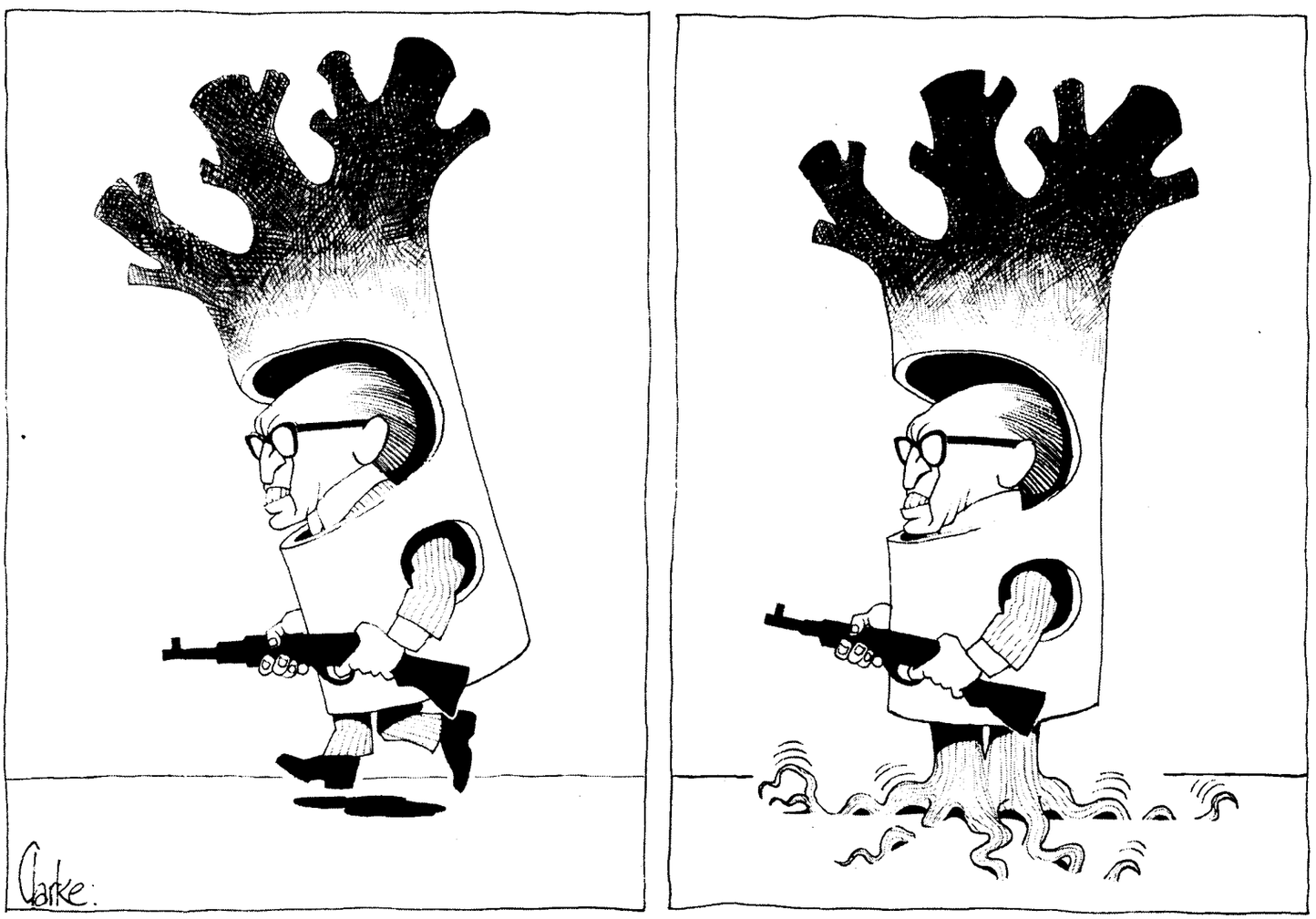
Thornett himself is scarcely an advocate of open government: he declares that the whole business is an 'internal union matter', and declines to discuss it. But in a rare outburst he has described the union officials, fairly enough, as assuming the roles of 'judge, jury and executioner'. (One attempt, by the secretary of Thornett's own branch, to get a court to declare the whole business unlawful, has failed.) The revolutionary parties – mainly the WSL and the International Marxist Group – naturally declare that it is a McCarthyite witch-hunt by officials intent on collaborating with the new management.

But polemic does not do justice to this critical piece of industrial history. Cowley is now undergoing its fourth union inquiry in a dozen years: the record of conflict inside the T&G between – broadly – the Trotskyists and their opponents is now so bitter that it affects almost every trade unionist in Oxford and the Government's industrial strategy as well.

It is, of course, Cowley where the Trotskyist goal of assembling an industrial base has been most successful, and equally Cowley is vital to British Leyland's future. The new boss, Michael Edwardes, says that everything depends on medium-sized cars, where the profit-margins are largest. It is in this market, dominated by the company car, that Leyland has been most inadequate.

Cowley now produces the Marina, the Maxi and the Princess. Though much rests on the re-vamped Mini from Longbridge, Edwardes probably intends a facelift for the Princess, and the seven-year-old Marina, as well as a medium-sized 'Cortina-bashing' saloon to replace the Allegro and the Maxi by 1982.

But if the Cowley plant is to go into the eighties with these three models, investment of about £300 million is required. Though Edwardes is asking for the Government to produce the money as an 'act of faith', it is not likely to be forthcoming without a quies-



Cedar of Lebanon

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cent workforce. Nobody doubts that the first six months of a new operation will be crucial, or that production continuity is a necessity.

With the press identifying Cowley as the 'skiver's paradise' and the home of the 'Sleeping Princess', the local union officials have clearly decided that the time has come to sort out the assembly plant. There have indeed been discussions with the management, who have promised to put their own house in order if the unions will do the same with theirs.

The assembly plant – as against the body plant across the road – certainly has a poor record. In the five years to 1970 it had 1,600 stoppages, during which time there were fewer than 20 in the body plant. The celebrated historical explanation is that the late Lord Nuffield kept the unions out of the assembly plant right up to the fifties, while the independent Pressed Steel management accommodated both the T&G and the AUEW at the body plant. Nuffield's personal style, with all managers narrowly responsible to him, produced a vacuum after his departure, which was filled by the shop stewards. A habit of conflict proliferated into disputes between the AUEW and the T&G, whose relations remain notably strained.

Laid over this industrial sociology is the charge – made by Harold Wilson among others – that in recent years 'agitators' have engineered 'manifestly avoidable stoppages'. Certainly temporary removal of the Left's power-base in spring 1974 – when the management withdrew Thornett's negotiating credentials – was accompanied by a marked industrial change. Between Spring 1972 and Spring 1974 3.2 million man hours, and the production of 96,000 vehicles, were lost at the assembly plant. In the following two 'Thornett-less' years, hours lost fell to 500,000 and production losses fell to 28,500. In 1977 there were only two major strikes, one in the maintenance department and another in the paint shop.

The mechanics of Thornett's removal are worth examination. A series of strikes had occurred early in 1974 over the use of industrial engineers to oversee production-line speeds. Soon afterwards Thornett pulled his transport-drivers section out over lay-off pay. Along with his colleagues in what was then called the Workers Revolutionary Party, Thornett was just then entangled in apocalyptic propositions about Edward Heath and the miners' strike. Thornett believed that the three-day week would produce six million unemployed, and would bankrupt Leyland.

The politics of catastrophe may have led him to press the transport strike when he had insufficient plant-wide support. Two hundred wives of Cowley workers demonstrated against the strike, and got sympathetic press coverage, reinforcing workforce anger at the drain of pay due to regular stoppages. The strike collapsed.

The management seized their moment, and withdrew negotiating recognition from Thornett. At that point, he was a deputy senior steward, chairman of the 5/55 branch – the only one in assembly – and by virtue of that, the chairman of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee.

There was a union inquiry, which cleared Thornett, and rather belatedly defended the principle that the membership should select their own representatives. But the effect of the report was to push the militants out of office.

It worked in two ways. First, it ruled that there should be a ballot for the election of the senior shop steward and the seven deputy senior shop stewards, where previously the choice had been made by an oligarchy of 160 shop stewards. Second, it cut away Thornett's base by forming a new branch, named 5/293, into which were transferred 4,000 of the 5,000 members of Thornett's 5/55.

In the ensuing ballot for stewards, Thornett injudiciously stood against his fellow-militant Bob Fryer, who had been senior steward for fifteen years. Thornett got 407 votes, Fryer got 824, and the obsessively anti-militant Reg Parsons – once a member of the Socialist Labour League, forerunner of the Workers Revolutionary Party – got 1,881. Thereafter the Mole failed to be elected chairman of the brand-new Branch 5/293, and the militants were confirmed in their isolation.

The inquiry found that Fryer had openly encouraged minority groups of workers, who had voted against returning to work, to clock out and go home. The Trotskyists no doubt needed to unite against the management in spring 1974, but this kind of thing was too much for the International Marxist Group. Their paper talked of 'undemocratic and manipulative methods' on the part of the Workers Revolutionary Party shop stewards, and added that 'the tragic irony of Cowley is that the WRP has allowed demands for trade union democracy, which should be the keynote of revolutionary work in the trade unions, to become the property of right-wing opportunists who pervert legitimate complaints for their own ends.'

Thornett, however, declined to fade away. In December 1975 he managed at last to get elected as chairman of 5/293, where 'the political action was'.

A disgruntled Reg Parsons claimed that the result was produced by organising a strike which dispersed the electorate on polling day. Originally, the plan had been to finish work at 4.30 p.m. and make a short march down to the polling station at the Cowley Social Club. But the bulk of the work-force was laid off by lunchtime. Only 140 out of 4,000 were there at the branch meeting, and Thornett got in by a majority of nine.

Within a month, the Right had reverted to their original ploy: calling for the formation of yet one more new branch.

Another month later the election for senior shop steward came round again. In some desperation, Parsons called a well-attended press conference, described the plant as 'a bee-hive of extremist activity', and warned that if the Trots got back it would be the end of Cowley. Fleet Street, well-attuned to such matters, briefed their readers on the moderate slate, and advised, with a full-page heading: 'BEWARE THE MOLE'. Parsons returned as senior steward.

In April 1976 Jack Jones appointed Reg Buckle as T&G district officer responsible for the body and assembly plant, and the battle-lines hardened up. Buckle, a self-avowed 'militant moderate', set about dismantling Thornett's power-base. He rearranged the local automotive committee – to which Thornett had been going as a branch chairman – in such a way that only senior stewards from the six big local motor-plants could attend. He then disbanded the Joint Shop Steward Committee, saying that it was an unofficial extremist pressure-group.

The Left attempted revenge in autumn 1976 when four shop stewards on the Princess line found that Buckle was unwilling to take action over the sacking of a coloured worker named Mustafa Hussein. They said Buckle was a racist. Buckle claimed Hussein's disciplinary record did not warrant his defence to the death. Regardless, the four stewards called an unofficial meeting which brought the line to a halt – and the management withdrew their credentials.

Another regional inquiry ensued, which ruled that the four had tried to undermine senior shop steward Reg Parson's authority. It empowered Buckle to make further organisational changes, including the formation of another new branch, as the Right had mooted not long before. (The inquiry found that the average attendance at 5/293 branch meetings under Thornett was 14 out of 4,500. It is not a particularly abysmal record, in spite of Thornett's taste for long discussions of high politics: even at the unreconstructed 7,000-strong branch in the peaceful body shop only 40-100 appeared to discuss solid trade union affairs.)

The violent *denouement* came on 15 June last year, when Buckle held mass meetings for the day shift and the night shift, to put the inevitable recommendation that a third branch should be created. The meetings, less than 45 minutes long, were each held with a well-barricaded lorry acting as a platform.

The Trotskyists placed themselves noisily near the front. But Thornett – whose branch membership was about to be siphoned yet again – was not permitted to speak in opposition. Defending this abrogation of democracy, Buckle's supporters allege that experience shows that anyone who surrenders a microphone to Thornett is unlikely to get it back.

At the first meeting the lorry was stormed, and some manhandling took place. At the second, Buckle and Parsons were actually chased into hiding. The Left claim that by

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the end of the meeting the pandemonium – created in large part by themselves – was such that no-one knew what specific motion was being put. Buckle, however, saw a forest of hands for the new branch, which was duly set up as 5/837, and has now acquired 2,400 members.

Anger was unabated at the subsequent district committee meeting in October, and it had to be abandoned. At this point, Buckle levelled his battery of charges at Thornett and eleven other members. For good measure, the Trades Council weighed in, accusing some T&G delegates of misusing the Trades Council's name in a pamphlet attacking fellow T&G members for their behaviour during the lengthy and abortive Randolph Hotel strike.

Then in December the anti-Trotskyists suffered a crippling reverse. Bob Fryer won back his senior stewardship, gaining 1,195 votes to Reg Parsons' 995, and Thornett got in as a deputy senior steward with 796 votes, his first success in a factory-wide ballot. The moderates' whole justification had been that the Trots had no mass support, and that their undiscriminating exploitation of every sectional grievance had alienated the membership. This claim received no support in the December ballot.

There is in fact ambiguity in the members' attitude to Thornett. On the one hand he is known as a thorough and hard negotiator, deeply knowledgeable about the company, who can be relied upon to support every strike – even the engine tuners' sectional claim over differentials in 1975. On the other hand, laid-off workers not directly involved are apt to grow resentful.

As he has no practical alternative strategy for Leyland, his constituency is highly transitory. The grand-sounding pieces of union apparatus, which his dedication enables him on occasion to capture, do in reality little more than disguise the hollowness of rank-and-file activity.

But the bureaucratic methods deployed against the Trotskyists are scarcely any better than the manipulations the revolutionaries are accused of. The secret charges and secret hearings are absurdly one-sided, and are brought with no intention but to produce a guilty verdict. Indeed, the district inadvertently sent out expulsion letters to Thornett and one other leftist before the regional officers had had time to meet.

David Buckle, it seems, is determined to fight fire with fire – but in this process, the likeliest loser will be union democracy. On Saturday, the Trotskyists are having a conference in Oxford to start building up a campaign of resistance, and if Thornett is expelled – and so put out of work – it is likely that a strike will be the first consequence. This time though, the strike will be against the union.

Christopher Hitchens: The Neutron Bomb and the Conscience of the Dutch

The implications of a neutron bomb policy are so disturbing that even former supporters of the weapon are now divided among and within themselves. This week has been loud with rumours that President Carter has abandoned his earlier certainties, and decided to make it a bargaining chip for disarmament talks instead. But meanwhile there is still a strong military lobby in favour. The pivotal argument has been the attitude of other NATO countries to the deployment of the bomb on their soil. Conflicting leaks in Washington only confirm what is already known – that while many established governments and parties in Europe are uncritical of the neutron bomb, unexpected opposition has developed. With a NATO summit coming (and a UN Session on Disarmament) a decision must come soon.

> An enhanced radiation warhead provides increased kill capability principally against personnel and reduces collateral effects (blast and thermal). It has less effect on standard military equipment than a fission weapon of the same yield. With this weapon, armoured vehicles, which are relatively unaffected by blast effects except at close range, can be temporarily neutralised by radiation casualties of crew personnel.

That euphemistic prose is extracted from a United States Defence Department briefing of last July. It summarises the allure to the military of a neutron warhead deployed in Europe against the vast tank concentrations of the Warsaw pact. But the proposed weapon is so unlovely, and the logic of its deployment is so dangerous, that it has crystallised opposition to nuclear politics and revived the almost-forgotten practice of thinking about the unthinkable.

Later on in the same briefing document appeared the following magnificent sentence. 'There is no evidence that NATO governments would be particularly concerned with Lance (missile) deployment with this warhead'. Certainly, most NATO governments are pliable as a rule. Our own Mr Callaghan rushed to welcome the neutron bomb idea as if he had thought of it all by himself. Yet now even the West Germans are having second thoughts about being the guinea-pig for the bomb. And in Holland; docile, civilised, agreeable Holland, a majority of Parliament and people have declared against the neutron warhead and the thinking which lies behind it.

Up until now, each individual step in the arms race appears to have been necessitated by the one which went before, and to entail the ones which come after. The total result – huge overkill capacities, giant and wasteful complexes of weaponry, galloping proliferation and the threat of plutonium terrorism – is glaringly and obviously irrational. But each single decision could be made to seem logical and necessary at the time. If the Dutch repudiation of the neutron bomb spreads to other NATO countries and stiffens Congressional opposition in the United States, then it will be the first time that the Strangeloves have lost a round for some time.

They never intended us to know about it in the first place. Like most of these life and death decisions, the idea of building and developing a neutron bomb was intended to be a secret. It just so happened last summer that Walter Pincus of the *Washington Post* noticed one sentence in the report of an Appropriations Sub-committee on Public Works, Power and Water Projects. This one sentence (in the improbable report) earmarked funds for an enhanced radiation warhead for a Lance missile, and Pincus chanced to know what those terms meant. So now the story is out.

The neutron bomb is not, technically, a new idea. It was first put forward in 1958, and is the origin of the macabre supposed distinction between 'clean' and 'dirty' nuclear weapons. Had Nixon won the 1960 election, he had been planning to push ahead with this most Nixonian of bombs. But in the event, Kennedy and Macnamara felt it too risky to do so themselves.

A neutron bomb begins as a very carefully-designed, small-scale thermonuclear bomb: after its hydrogen nuclei have undergone fusion, the binding energy released is used to generate enormous quantities of neutron radiation from other, suitably-selected elements in the bomb's configuration. The design of such a weapon – especially within the cross-section of an eight-inch shell – requires very precise knowledge of the 'thermonuclear burn wave'. The physics is not new, but it is an area in which the Americans have an enormous advantage, and this degree of exclusivity helps endear the weapon to its admirers. A one kiloton warhead of this sort would, according to the US Defence Nuclear Agency, if detonated at a height of 130-200 metres, only destroy buildings 130 metres from the point of detonation.

Those unlucky enough to be within one kilometre of the blast would absorb 8000 or more units of radiation (rads) like a gigantic X-ray. They would be knocked out but might live as long as 48 hours. Between one and two kilometres from the explosion, victims would absorb between 6500 and 8000 rads. Death for them would be up to a week away and it would be theo-

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retically possible for the soldiers among them to fight on. Between two and two-and-a-half kilometres away, 200-650 rads would be involved and would give their targets a month to prepare for death. To be more than that distance away from the detonation is to risk no more than 200 rads, but anything over this dosage, and some levels below it, leads to long term effects.

The lucky ones would perhaps suffer no more than leukaemia later on, or deformed children in the future (if any). All of this assumes pinpoint accuracy, or something very near to it. The Lance missile has a margin or error of up to one quarter of a mile, which are not the odds that many NATO footsoldiers would choose for themselves.

The effects of such a bombardment are not secret at all. They have been understood for years. As early as 1950, an official report of the United States Atomic Energy Commission described death by radiation sickness as running a gamut from 'a tendency to spontaneous internal bleeding towards the end of the first week . . . swelling and inflammation of the throat . . . a decrease in size and degenerative changes in the testes and ovaries; ulceration of the tonsils and of the mucous membrane of the large intestine . . . continuing until the day of death'.

At least an area so bombed would be occupiable again by the victorious force (if any), since neutrons dissipate very fast. This is what has given rise to the gallows humour about a 'super-capitalist weapon' which spares property and crucifies people.

In point of fact, the objection to the bomb is not its lethality. It is the fact that it is made and designed to be *used*, while other weapons of mass extermination and destruction are made, at least theoretically, to *deter* by their sheer scale. Which is why even Lord Chalfont finds the neutron bomb unacceptable as a means of halting the Russian hordes.

> A new generation of tactical nuclear weapons would be an absolute disaster. New weapons with a lower yield and greater accuracy and presumably few collateral consequences would erode rather than strengthen deterrence, and could at worst increase the prospects of eventual nuclear war. *Paul Warnke. Now Director of US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. 1975.*
>
> I do not believe that its deployment can be restricted to merely tactical purposes, and therefore I am not convinced that our security is greater with this bomb. *General Wolf Graf Baudissin, West German army, 1978.*

Although the idea of a neutron bomb has been rejected several times in America in the past twenty years, its new adherents speak of it as if it were the latest thing. There is a potentially sinister reason for this, which is the poor performance of America and her allies in guerrilla-type wars over the last couple of decades. Certainly Daniel Ellsberg, at the recent Amsterdam conference against the neutron bomb, alleged that it was designed largely for use against those who could not retaliate in kind. And ex USAF Major General George Keegan, a keen lobbyist for the bomb in Washington, likes to point out how useful it would have been in Vietnam (if only . . .) and how handy it might yet prove to the Israelis.

This notion is clearly chilly enough for anybody, and no doubt there are even worse paranoids who dream of irradiating the urban strongholds of the Italian Communist Party one day, but at the moment the bomb is *ostensibly* designed and commissioned for the defence of Europe, and it is Europeans who are registering opposition to being defended in this way.

The concept of the nuclear 'threshold', or as it is sometimes called, the 'firebreak' between conventional clashes and nuclear incineration, is the key here. Most opposition to the bomb in establishment circles derives from the belief that the threshold would be dangerously lowered, the firebreak blurred at the edges.

President Carter has said that the bomb will not be used without his authorisation, and that it will be considered for us much like any other nuclear device. If this reassurance is genuine, then much of the rationale of the weapon is removed.

It is intended as a quick response to a

massed attack by tanks – in which the Warsaw Pact still has a commanding lead. The point of having a neutron weapon is to use it, swiftly, and destroy as little of West Germany as seems feasible in the process. This dichotomy in Carter's argument was pointed out to me by Max van der Stoel, the former Dutch Foreign Minister and a committed pro-NATO social democrat.

But the inconsistencies multiply as the argument goes along. The bomb could not be used in isolation, or certainly could not once it had been used once. It would have to form part of a package: a cluster of weapons from ordinary rockets to large-scale warheads. Not all the targets in a battle for Central Europe could or would be radiation-sensitive, so the usefulness of the neutron bomb would be very limited. And there would always be the possibility of poisoning friendly troops of another NATO detachment. The Russians and their clients could not be expected to oblige by coming on in human or tank waves across open country. A full-scale world war could be triggered early on by the use of a neutron bomb, and as Harold Brown, the US Secretary of Defence, said recently, nobody can claim that a limited war is containable once it has begun.

The whole tactical arsenal would need to be committed once a radiation weapon had been brought into play. The *tactical* effect, if one wants to attempt an epigram, would be *strategic*. Not least because it would destroy Europe in order to save it.

The concept of 'threshold' is dissolving in any case. There are now a large number of 'conventional' weapons, such as the Maverick, which can be made nuclear by the insertion of an extra component. (The components are withheld from the delivery systems in many cases for fear that somebody might kidnap a nuke for 'unauthorised use' or because of apprehension that an over-enthusiastic ally might go nuclear on its own. These are the sort of risks that are weighed daily.)

Even if it is assumed – and it is assumed by NATO – that the Soviet Union would launch a massive conventional attack without a pre-emptive nuclear strike, then there is another grisly problem. What about the surviving irradiated tank crews? Their tanks would only be partially affected if at all. The soldiery would be shocked, poisoned and perhaps out of contact with forward command. What would their discipline be like? Jeremy Stone, the director of the Federation of American Scientists, compares this horrific scenario to a cowboy wanting a delayed-reaction bullet for a shootout. 'He'll kill his opponent, but the opponent will have enough time to get his revenge'. Small wonder, then, that some NATO military leaders do not want to authorise their commanders to deploy this bomb.

In the debate in Congress on the issue, Senator Dick Clark of Iowa had this to say. After pointing out that the neutron bomb was still more destructive than any conventional weapon in the US arsenal he went on:

> This is a nuclear warhead. The fact that it manages to reduce blast and thermal impact while maintaining the same level of lethal neutron radiation hardly qualifies it as a 'clean' weapon, except, I guess, to those amongst us nowadays for whom the words 'kilotons' and 'megatons' seem to have lost their terrible meaning.

It is exactly that erosion of distinctions between tactical and strategic, between limited and general, between conventional and nuclear war, that has alarmed the phlegmatic Dutch and the cautious Germans on whose territory the holocaust would probably begin. They wonder if they need a weapon which, as the *Washington Post* pointed out editorially, would

> set NATO's nuclear force on more of a hair-trigger, when sound strategic doctrine demands a reliable safety catch: and it would commit NATO more deeply to the dangerous premise that a small nuclear exchange can be conducted without serious risk of expanding into a general nuclear war.

It is under this kind of pressure that Jimmy Carter has agreed not to proceed with the manufacture or deployment of the bomb until Congress has approved it, and until

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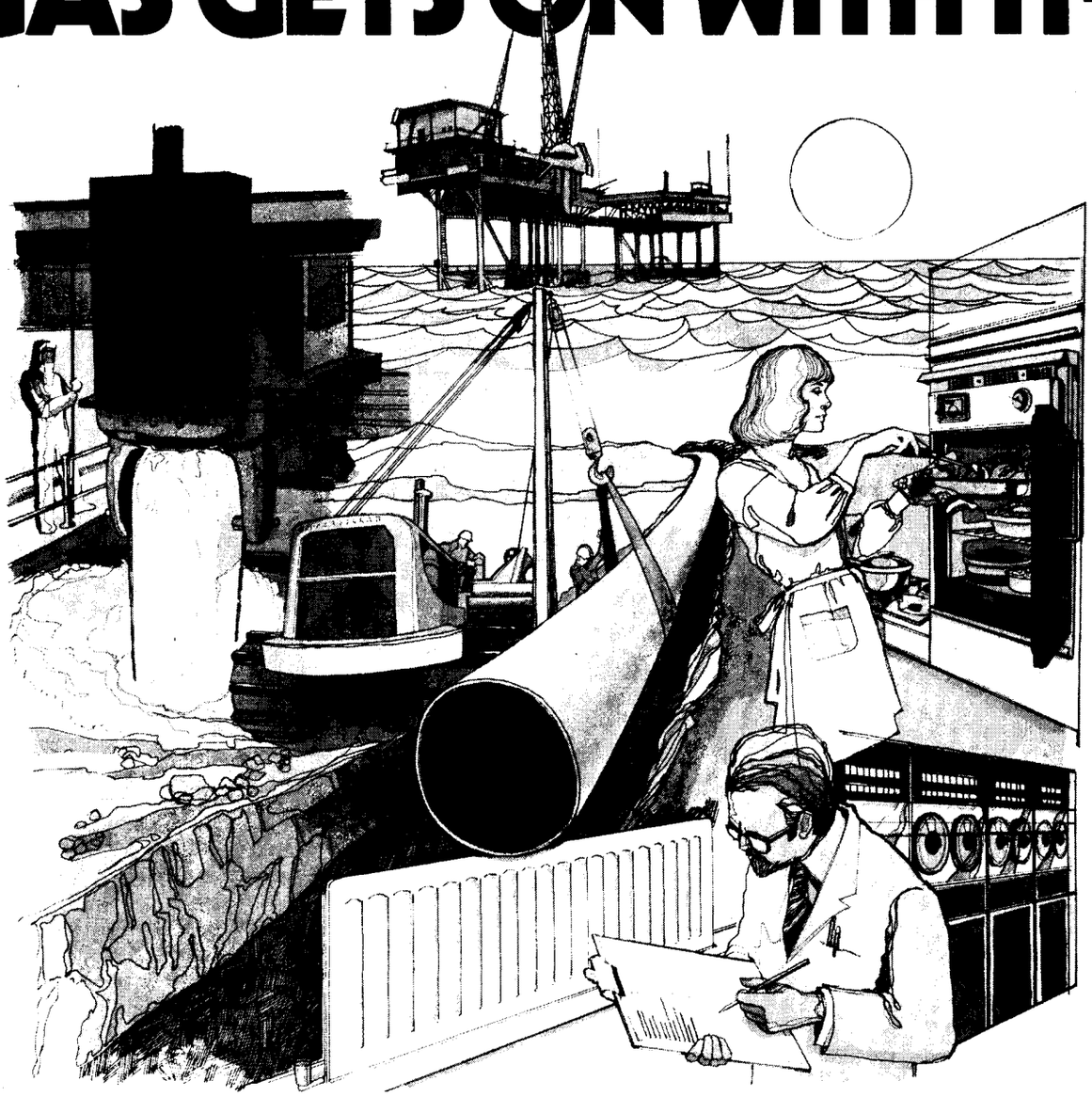
GAS GETS ON WITH IT–



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NATO governments have agreed. The *development* of the thing is proceeding, and responsibility for this lies with the Atomic Energy Authority and not with the Pentagon. In the past, many weapons have been put into commission because they were there, and because it was too late to have a democratic decision after all the money and all the contracts had been disbursed. Perhaps the principle of the Kaiser's railway timetables will not apply this time.

> In my opinion, neutron bombs only have value for war-fighting if they can be used on a mass scale, and if the power to use them first has been given to the military commanders in time of peace. By that, we would delegate to the military the decision to step across the nuclear threshold and go on the way to self-destruction. If we do not want that (and we have good reasons for not wanting it) then the introduction of these weapons will have no military sense. *Major General von Meyenfeldt. Head of Royal Dutch Military Academy.*

A few weeks ago, the Dutch Parliament voted by 110 votes to 40 against the production or deployment of the neutron bomb. This large majority was made up not just of the parties of the Left, but of a large proportion of the Christian Democratic governing coalition. It is getting rather difficult to find anybody in Holland to defend the bomb.

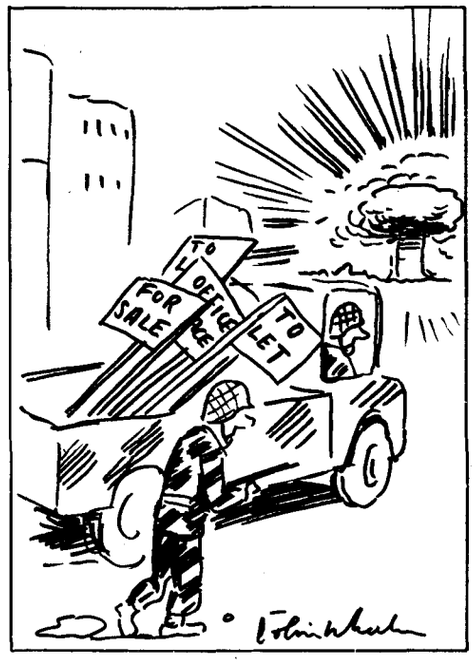
Jacob Rietaerk, parliamentary leader of the Liberal Party (which is on the extreme Right, as its name implies) had a brave try at describing the dissenters as 'Moscow inspired' – the sort of thing Lord Chalfont might have come up with if he wasn't against the neutron bomb himself. The Russians must be stronger in Mr Rietaerk's country than anybody has suspected. Over a million signatures, out of an electorate of about 7.5 million, have been put to a petition, and the demonstration in Amsterdam two weeks ago was the largest in Holland since the war.

On the surface, Holland is a typical *burgerlich* European state. A model member of NATO and the EEC, it has few visible internal problems and its society is almost blissfully social-democratic in character while its economy is safely multinational in form. Sensible about race-relations, tolerant even of the deranged South Moluccans, Holland seems maddeningly stable and prosperous. But it is a country with a very sensitive conscience, especially about international affairs, and although it is a loyal member of the Western alliance it has not lost the habit of thinking for itself.

Because the Dutch make a point of speaking everybody else's language, and because generally the compliment is not returned, their own political affairs are almost conducted in a private discourse. It came as an admitted shock to the Americans to discover the extent of opposition to their new plan. The Communists they had bargained for. The Radical Party – fair enough. But the massed, sober ranks of the Dutch Labour Party? The Christian Democrats? Even the former Protestant anti-Revolutionary Party, originally founded to oppose the ideas of 1789, let alone 1917, has joined the 'rejection front'.

Two recurring themes will strike any new observer of Dutch politics. The first of these is the pervasiveness of religion. There is a certain stern righteousness about all political parties, papers and positions – the sort of Calvinist stance which, in a thoroughly depraved form can be found among Afrikaaners too. Not that Catholics are not strongly represented as well; the Christian Democrats are in fact an amalgam of former Protestant and Catholic parties. The Dutch Council of Churches was one of the first into the field in protest against the neutron bomb – mostly on humanitarian grounds but deploying some useful political muscle as well. When the Christian Democratic Minister of Defence, Dr Roelof Kruisanga, resigned his portfolio last month in protest at the bomb he was careful to stress his own Protestant and Pacifist upbringing. Although he is regarded as a rather opportunist politician, the good doctor is still given credit by his opponents for opposing the weapon in private as well as public, and in the councils of NATO.

It is not every day that a Defence Minister resigns on such a point, or that such



ecumenical unity is displayed. On the Left, the point is often made that unity of diverse forces is something of a Dutch tradition, and that it derives from the second recurring political theme – that of the wartime Resistance. That movement, which was unexampled in that it actually brought off a general strike against the Occupation, is still very much alive in the hearts and minds sense. The vast public interest taken in the trial of Pieter Menten for war crimes was part proof of that. The Resistance has also left a legacy of ambiguous feelings towards Germany, which has a bearing on the nuclear issue as well. Holland is linked to West Germany (and the United Kingdom) in a consortium called URENCO which supplies enriched uranium to Brazil. The Dutch government has very high non-proliferation standards, and is concerned at the bilateral German deal which bids fair to put plutonium in Brazilian hands. The neutron bomb movement thus cuts with the grain, by evoking related dismay about nuclear developments of the kind which are now such an issue in Western Europe. For the Dutch conscience, it is the right issue at the right time, and that is why generals, bishops and trade union leaders are all united on the point.

All of Holland's armed forces are NATO-committed, so the importance of Dutch resistance is not small. The US Air Force Central Europe (AFCENT) HQ is in Holland, and the Dutch brigade is deployed on the North German plain. Indeed, the eastern Netherlands are the natural and obvious fall-back for Germany if Armageddon comes. The Dutch government is in duty bound to represent the views of its Parliament and people to NATO and to Washington, and the force of public opinion shows no sign of slackening. The Americans are sufficiently worried about this unravelling of the usual taken-for-granted solidarity to have despatched a special envoy to Europe to try and talk everybody into line or at least into not contradicting each other in public. (Mr Warren Christopher also has the task of trying to square Turkey and Greece over Cyprus as well, and thus clearing the debris of NATO's last European triumph, so his task is unenviable enough).

Another area of Dutch concern is the continuing negotiation on Mutual Balanced Force Reductions in Europe (MBFR). Under the previous Social-Democratic government, it was Holland which proposed, successfully, that NATO offer the Russians a token reduction of 1000 warheads. With Moscow's propaganda centred on the neutron bomb at the moment (in order to distract attention from its own development of the SS20 missile) it looks as if American enthusiasm for radiation warfare will provide the Russians with the occasion to stall, and that MBFR will be fouled up and with it the Dutch contribution to force reduction. (NATO has 7000 nuclear warheads in Europe, which is nearly 5000 more than are thought necessary for deterrence, so the stakes are modest enough).

The keywords in this sort of debate are 'Relatively' and 'Credibly', and the neutron bomb is no exception. Its proponents feel that it is relatively more effective and credibly deterrent while 'marginal' in its effect on arms control. The Dutch believe none of these propositions. They believe that if you can believe that you can believe anything. Two professors of radio-biology, van Bekkum of the University of Leiden and Berendsen of the University of Amsterdam, have written an article suggesting that the radius of death of the bomb will be as large as sixteen times its target area, and that it just is not as 'clean' as the Strangeloves say it is. In which case, it destabilises the balance of terror without giving any compensating advantage. Which is where we came in.

For the Dutch, the congruence between morality and practicality is very strong in this case, and provides the motivation and the durability of their opposition. In the United States, the neutron bomb is a test case on yet another front – that of open government. At one point early last year, Congress could not allow itself to debate the issue (of a neutron 155mm shell this time) because even the fact that the US wanted to build one was shielded by a high security classification.

The entire web of secrecy made some

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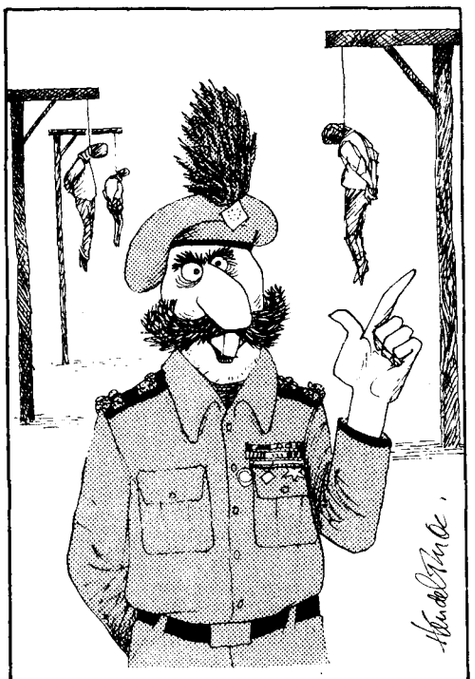


'We in Pakistan don't like *hanging political opponents, but a nail shortage makes crucifixion impractical.'*

representatives wonder aloud how the Warsaw Pact could be deterred by a weapon system which they, along with the American voter and taxpayer, were not supposed to know about. Of course, if the bomb were being made by the British government we should have had no right to know about it at all, and there would have been a reasonable chance of keeping everything secret. But Congress insisted, rather belatedly, on its entitlement to a debate.

During the slightly lame process, Senator Mark Hatfield and other anti-neutron bomb spokesmen felt that things were being kept from them. For instance, the administration did not bother to file an 'arms control impact' statement, as it is legally bound to do, about the new procurement. By the time any discussion on the weapon could be convened, it already had the status of a project rather than a proposal, and thus all the advantages of momentum. Next time (if there is a next time) this neutron warhead may be presented as the first of a natural generation of radiation weapons. Work is already on foot to develop a non-atomic trigger for the bomb – perhaps a laser. This would almost eliminate blast and heat, and be the great 'people-killer' of all time. And there will be military men to argue that this means it is not really a nuclear weapon at all.

So if anything is going to be done, it will have to be done soon. At present, the Dutch government is caught between its parliamentary situation and its other commitments. The West Germans are waking up to the implications too. Egon Bahr, a major figure in Schmidt's party, has called the neutron bomb 'a symbol of the perversion of human thinking' and remarked that 'it seems to be an ideal of latest progress that it is easier to clear away human bodies than to remove the rubble of cities and factories'.

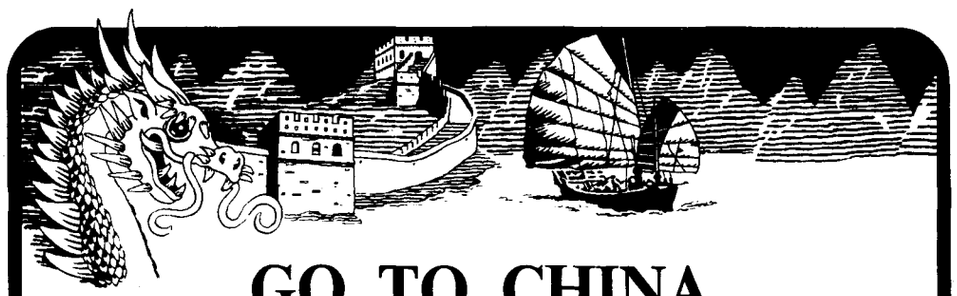
Faced with this and other indications of concern, Helmut Schmidt has backed away from welcoming the bomb, and made it clear that it is 'too early for the Federal government to take a definite stand'. He clearly wishes the initiative, if any, to come from Carter, and had spoken of the significant psychological and strategic questions which have to be clarified in our own alliance.' Defence Minister George Leber has said anxiously, in response to American-inspired leaks from NATO HQ that 'it is not true that we Germans have shown special interest within NATO for the neutron bomb'.

So the poor West German Foreign Minister left for Washington this week with a wad of contradictory statements behind him in Bonn, and another batch awaiting him at his destination.

NATO has a summit meeting in Washington in May, and a great deal of log-rolling to do in between. The real test of American enthusiasm for this bomb is still ahead, and it is clear that they do not wish to seem the sole enthusiasts. It is becoming easier to see why they hoped to avoid publicity or controversy on the point.

It is the Dutch who have made the qualitative difference by showing that those who are of one mind on strategy may not be of the same mind on tactics. They did not take the decision lightly, and it was not until last February that the parliamentarians of the Hague matched the mood of the young and old badge-wearers of the streets of Amsterdam. But at least they had an argument about it, and set a standard which it will be embarrassing for other European countries not to emulate. At the time of writing, the Belgian Socialist Party looks like another dissenting voice, though in the more conformist and less well-adjusted sectarian politics of their country there is not the same opportunity for clear-thinking about international affairs. As M. R. D. Foot writes in his book on Resistance, there is an old Dutch proverb which remarks that only dead fish swim with the stream.

This image comes forcibly to mind when the arguments for the bomb are put forward. Its supporters are almost literally fatalistic. They say that it is no worse than what we have already built, rather as the wiseacres used to say that Hiroshima involved fewer deaths than Tokyo – as if that settled the question of quantum leaps in weaponry. They say that the balance of terror is the guarantee of peace, as if the neutron bomb did not deny even the logic of the balance of terror. They say that radiation is no worse a way to die than many other ways – which is true but not the point unless you are already a terminal cancer victim, and unless one cares to imagine highly irradiated soldiers manning highly sophisticated tanks. It was Herman Kahn who first posed the question about nuclear exchanges – 'will the living envy the dead?' – but it took the born-again Jimmy Carter to make the unthinkable thinkable. Mutual Assured Destruction (M.A.D. if you insist) has always been a horrific principle, but there is something emblematic about the neutron weapon which has reduced the mad logic to absurdity. The Dutch reject this treadmill. Who follows?



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First Person

Arthur Marshall

Flat Out

A few recent instances of rather sluggishly clotting nose-bleeds, always visited on me at moments of high inconvenience (just when settling into a theatre seat, or attacking a grilled kipper, or gulping, deafened by cries of 'Cheerio, chaps!', a glass of bubbly with the Bultitudes), have led me to suspect that I may be a haemophiliac and therefore almost certainly of royal blood. But where can this regal strain have crept in? I remember that my paternal grandmother looked, in her latter and plumply rounded stages, the dead spit of Queen Victoria, but that hardly seems a quite close enough connection. She was the jolliest of grandmothers, that happy relationship, and she and her forebears came from Bath, a city much frequented by royalty, and those weird Georges in particular. Can there have been somewhere along the line an abandoned *moment de folie* in the Pump Room? Can haemophilia lie dormant for a couple of centuries and then suddenly pop up in some distinguished being fully worthy of its august background? Myself for instance?

But what, when my royal complaint starts up again, to do for the best? I do not whine but I have never in my life received a great deal of help in either physical knowledge or medical matters. At school no fatherly biology master ever spilt the beans about you know what. When puberty arrived with a startling bang, my parents kept mum on the subject, though alerted by my pimples and shifty looks to the fact that something was up. They confined themselves to sad and reproving glances when they suspected, and how rightly, that I was giving the new machinery a trial run or two or three. It is true that one of my godfathers, looking deeply serious, urged me never to stoop to anything 'that might upset your mother and father'. But that could have been a wide variety of things. Cheating at halma, for instance.

When, during the 12 years I lived in London, kind friends, finding me immobilised by 'flu, anxiously asked me who my doctor was, I had to reply that I didn't have one. I assumed that, if really seriously struck down, 'somebody' would come. I have never anyway had much truck with doctors, pleasant enough men and consistently conscientious but, in my experience, frequently as nonplussed as their patients. And so I tend, with the aid of dispirins and codeine and hope, to manage on my own.

Though I am, naturally, always delighted to hear of any religion, however bizarre, that can bring any solid comfort to anybody, I am not a Christian Scientist, never having quite followed why it is apparently perfectly OK in the M.B. Eddy world to have your teeth attended to but not to enlist the help of other branches of the healing art. Can it be (and please don't send me pamphlets) because Mrs Eddy's second husband was a dentist and her wisdoms had benefited from his skilled attentions? Eddy was husband No 3, and all of them were prosperous. Does this explain (and again, please don't write and tell me) why Mrs Eddy's flocks are, in this country at least, usually so very non-poor? When we lived pre-war in Berkshire, the local Christian Science church was surrounded at service times by a sea of Bentleys and Rolls-Royces, the chauffeurs deciding on the perceptible pleasures of a cigarette outside rather than any questionable spiritual comfort obtainable within.

In the 1920s, the system (it was hardly a religion though it has Eddy features in it) dreamt up by M. Emile Coué was much in vogue – a most unusual man who had kicked splendidly off as a chemist before moving on into the more interesting world of psychotherapy. Whether it was a more helpful world, who can say? Auto-suggestion was the thing and its devotees were encouraged to sit bolt upright in bed first thing in the morning and repeat, for the prescribed number of times, 'Every day and in every way I am becoming better and better', it being understood that 'better' had a physical rather than a moral significance. You then, presumably, sat back, sipped your tea, and waited for the magic to take effect.

After some thought, and late in the day for me though it may be, I have decided to give Transcendental Meditation a whirl, basing my activities on a book, *Yoga, Tantra and Meditation* by Swami Janakananda Saraswati, the name meaning, it seems, The Source of Bliss. Rider Books sell it, fully illustrated and diagrammed, exciting exercises galore, at £3.25 and quite early on there is an electrifying snap of the generously bearded source of bliss squatting in the lotus position and meditating transcendentally, as cool as a cucumber, in the very middle of a Danish motorway with jumbo lorries thundering past on all sides. Well, that at least gives one a target to aim at and I can possibly work gradually up to the M5, starting with a preliminary lotus or two in the narrow lane that leads down to 'Myrtlebank'. I am putting great reliance on the powerful current that, Mr Saraswati informs me, flashes up my spinal column and activates my brain. It is called the Kundalini. Much depends on my Kundalini.

The chapter on Yogic poses begins encouragingly with one called the 'Dead Still'. Just lie flat out wherever you chance to be and remain motionless. No trouble at all. Then we pass on to the 12 movements that go to make up the 'Sun, I Greet You' section but here, unfortunately, the descriptive photograph is one of those misty amalgams of the 12 different movements required, all photographically superimposed on each other with the result looking like a naked man with 24 legs and 12 bottoms and just about to be arrested for 'insulting behaviour in a public place'.

One must draw the line somewhere and I do not propose to go very fully into Chapter 7, which features 'The Tantric Sexual Act', merely stating that it is guaranteed, by no less an informant than A. Mookerjee, to produce 'the state called Ananda, eternal bliss, the highest joy' which, with its pleasant verbal reminder of the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, may indeed be true. A word of warning to those understandably keen to get going on these amatory antics. Before anything can happen *at all*, light up incense and make sure that your Kundalinis are in fullest operation. Serve wine, meat and fish (teetotallers and vegetarians may substitute coconut milk, sesame seeds and radishes). Rub the lady thoroughly with musk oil. Repeat the words So-Ham eleven times. Clean the entire house by sprinkling water all over it. Rattle through your wind-releasing exercises and throw in a headstand or two. Draw several squares and triangles on the floor. Then the lady sits on the gentleman's thigh, and after that it's more or less up to you.

Roger Woddis

Catchwords

Saatchi and Saatchi, the advertising agency, has been hired to sell the Conservative Party during the General Election campaign.

I'm Maggie – fly me,
Reach for the sky.
Screw the groundlings,
Travel CBI.

We believe in the individual,
And the right to kid you all.

Observe our firm stance,
Our programme's a plain one:
Give the Tories a chance –
We've an eye to the main one.

Profit isn't a dirty word,
Unless it's made by the common herd.

Bring back the rope,
And the baiting of bears,
Bring back the stocks –
Oh, and bring back the shares!

The party that stays together
Preys together.

On the question of race,
Let us be blunt:
With bigots like us,
Who needs the Front?

Are you with everything
That breathes and lives?
No, I'm with the Conservatives.

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London Diary

☐ It looks as though the plans for a 'European Brookings' are coming close to decision-point. The Prime Minister's personal policy adviser Bernard Donoghue is away at the weekend to join (secret) talks which may well edge the Ford Foundation into putting its credit properly on the line.

It's hard to oppose the idea of a well-founded outfit – similar to the original Brookings Institution in Washington – capable of providing independent advice about the policies and actions of the government in office. (It can also provide useful employment for the more intellectual members of the government *out* of office, not a dishonourable purpose either.) Anyway, the idea is certainly spreading. John Mackintosh MP has just submitted a plan to the Social Science Research Council, suggesting that they might care to fund a 'Scottish Brookings'. Those who've seen it consider it's extremely cogent, and if it succeeds in these devolutionary times, then Wales presumably can't be far behind.

The trouble is to convince oneself that it's *advice* – as against resolution – that's been the commodity we've lacked most seriously in the post-war decades.

☐ When you move into a new office, it's fairly important to check on the local pubs. The Royal Connaught, which is just around the corner from the NEW STATESMAN, is one of those places which offers its male customers an astonishing amount of graffiti. I'm not usually a fan of such things, but found it impossible not to be stopped by one which said:

HEISENBERG PROBABLY RULES, OK?

If the Heisenberg indeterminacy principle – which, if you recall, says that we can only account for the probable movements of matter because the act of observing it changes what it's up to – is getting onto the walls of pubs, then the Two Cultures really have got back together.

☐ It's possible that the Post Office – inadvertently, of course – has invented a quite new technology of graffiti.

They are busy at the moment promoting Viewdata: a system in which any telephone subscriber who can buy a fairly cheap piece of electronics will be able to turn an ordinary TV set into a computer terminal with access to astonishing quantities of useful (and less useful) information, all contained in a central computer store.

Wise men at the Advertising Standards Authority now see something potentially worrying in this system, for there seems to be no way of keeping a check on the ever-shifting contents of the computer's memory. Roughly, Viewdata will consist of a huge series of open letters, which various 'information providers' will feed into the system. The whole beauty is that updating will be done very rapidly, and that any kind of item will be instantly available to anyone who gets hold of an appropriate phone number. What is to stop it turning into an immensely more powerful version of the entirely unsupervised newsagent's window?

The possibility that some contractors might drift into massage-parlour advertising must be sufficiently chilling for the Post Office. Beyond this lies a threat which is potentially still more formidable. 'Phone phreaks' and computer freaks don't yet exist in this country in quite Californian numbers. But there are quite enough to be capable of breaking-into the secret phone numbers which will insert information into the system. The Post Office will have to work fairly hard to stop them using Viewdata's five-colour graphics as the underground art form of the 1980s. And even the most law-abiding of us will probably get a lot of pleasure from watching the struggle.

☐ Obviously, the NEW STATESMAN looks and feels a little different this week, and we hope that nobody is too much revolted by the change. Perhaps the most conspicuous point is that Spotlight on Politics has vanished after many years, during which it was focussed by some extremely distinguished journalists – notably, James Fenton, and my friend and predecessor Anthony Howard.

The first reason for change is that this form of political journalism, having been invented and brought to a very high pitch in the NEW STATESMAN, has now been copied by almost everybody you can think of. When one is being imitated quite so freely, it's probably time to move on to something else.

The sort of short notes that we have on page 450 fit into the general plan of the paper – which is now to have rather fewer, and rather longer, main articles. Given that one's trying to analyse a problem of social policy – or international politics – in a bit more depth than it's likely to get elsewhere, it's useful to have some short, sharp and hopefully informative pieces to give a change of pace.

And we'll try to make sure that it isn't all hard going about the prospects for unemployment in the 1980s. There's always going to be room in the middle of the paper for writing that sets out to do no more than give pleasure, and on suitable occasions the arts section or the books section ought to be found breaking into 'front half' territory. If there is a clear-cut line between politics and literature, I have to confess that it's never been visible to me.

☐ A name to watch for when the Finance Committee is re-formed after the Budget is that of Audrey Wise MP. Not without difficulty, she got onto it for the first time after last year's Budget, and made herself highly unpopular with the Treasury.

The Chancellor, you'll recall, had some contingent tax-relief in his budget which still hadn't been spent in the autumn. Mrs Wise conceived the idea of soaking this up by index-linking the bottom of the income-tax system, so that low-incomes taken 'out of tax' would be less likely to be brought back into it through inflationary effects. This struck the Government as being a touch over-radical, and it was only forced through because Mrs Wise made a tactical alliance with the Tories.

Since then, Mrs Wise claims, Denis Healey has told her 'to her face' that she will only get back onto the Finance Committee 'over his dead body'. Leaving aside the rights and wrongs of the tax issue itself, it will be constitutionally interesting to see whether the executive really does have such perfect control of the Commons committee system.

☐ I've always had a good deal of admiration for the people who run the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, but they do seem to have got involved with a most unhappy piece of symbolism over the Two Germanies. They have been organising a campaign against the Federal Republic's growing tendency to impose political restrictions on certain kinds of workers – certainly a nasty business, but nothing to parallel East European repression.

One aspect of the campaign is a 'trial' in which various judges pronounce on the state of civil liberties in Federal Germany. *Der Spiegel* has now published a letter which Chris Farley, of the Russell Foundation, sent to Willi Stoph, the President of the German Democratic Republic – asking if Herr Stoph could see his way to letting the writer Rudolf Bahro out of jail in the *East* so that he can cross over to the *West* and act as a judge on the liberties of the Federal Republic.

Bahro has been in jail since the DDR government took a dislike to *The Alternative*, his trenchant criticism of the brand of socialism they are practising. It's suggested that when he finally faces trial, it will be on the ludicrous charge of having been an American agent.

Le Monde has suggested that the Russell approach to the East Germans must have been founded on some kind of black humour. Not so, apparently. Chris Farley's colleague Ken Coates tells me that it was a perfectly serious approach: their idea was that Bahro, having given his judgment, would go quietly back to jail in East Germany. 'He's rather that sort of bloke; he wouldn't run away from anything.' Ken didn't see why anyone in either Germany should be offended by the idea.

Bruce Page

This England

Prizes: £3 book token for first entry, £2 tokens for others printed. Paste entries on a postcard.

☐ All told the auction brought in £10,597. An Austin Junior 40 pedal car made in the 1950s sold for £175. It had been renovated by British Leyland. – *Financial Times* (Badalia Herodsfoot)

☐ Councillor Nigel Betts asked if it was possible to bury people vertically instead of horizontally to save space to which the director of parks and recreation, Mr E. Bavestock, pointed out more than one person (usually four) are buried in one grave. – *Erith & Crayford Observer* (Peter Barnes)

☐ N.C. driller for T.H. machine, double-day shift. Good basic pay and bonus. Free overalls and safety footwear after qualifying period. First class pension scheme. Sports and social facilities. – *Leicester Mercury* (F. Lister)

☐ Seven British mountaineers are missing in the South Atlantic. – *Sunday Times* (D. J. Beck)

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Bruce Page: The Crack-Up of the Unemployment Machine

New evidence from the grassroots reinforces the proposition that our system for assisting the unemployed is theoretically unworkable, and practically a disaster.

Dutiful speeches will continue to prophesy improvement, and minor remissions will be welcomed as they occur. But the truth is that our socialist government has elected to live with large-scale, long-term unemployment.

If one takes a certain view of the economic circumstances which we analyse in our leader, it is possible to argue that this unemployment is a national necessity, caused in part at least by factors not under the Government's control. And radical morality is not necessarily compromised by failure to remedy the inevitable.

But the treatment accorded to the unavoidably unemployed must be within the Government's power – and failure to guarantee humane and generous treatment to those who are made idle for their country's good would indeed undermine the whole credit of Labour-in-office. It is now clear that our ramshackle social-security system no longer provides that guarantee. The necessary reforms will require great political and intellectual effort, have grave financial implications and may require confrontation with a trade-union power potentially more formidable than that attributed to the miners.

Documents in the matter include the current report of the Supplementary Benefits Commission*, the Supplementary Benefits Review – now drafted, and due for publication in a few weeks – such papers as we have on attempted management reforms in the regional offices of the Department of Health and Social Security – and most recently, a joint report from the DHSS Management Services Branch and the London Borough of Islington on the crack-up of the system inside one patch of inner-city territory.**

This last paper is the least grand, but in some ways the most alarming. With a frankness unprecedented among official documents, it confronts the basic question of what happens to people when they go to the DHSS counter for money to feed their families, or – in the classic phrase, made real by current statistics – because baby needs new shoes.

Its stiff, bureaucratic language substantiates most of the colourful denunciations that claimants' unions and citizens-rights groups have been trumpeting for years. What is described is a system of self-defeating complexity, rich with internal contradictions, being administered to people who can't understand it by people who scarcely comprehend it themselves: one which manages to unite sluggishness and inflexibility with uncertainty of effect, and which is capable of plain institutional dishonesty in dealing with persistent (or simply desperate) applicants.

The general problem is that the supplementary benefits scheme, meant to be a small-scale system for paying scale rates as of right, has been turned after thirty years of political makeshift towards becoming a large-scale system of discretionary benefits – operated by brigades of clerks who have neither the training nor the aptitude for making what are really ad-hoc developments of social policy. Makeshift, discretionary additions to the system have been the expedient of governments oppressed by social deprivation, but understandably nervous of the political backlash apt to be produced by radical increase in basic scales.

In fine detail, as the Islington report shows, the organisation of work within the DHSS system is now such as to produce a 'Catch-22' effect, in which any effort by a claimant to discover what is happening to an overdue case will probably make his or her predicament still worse. Under stress, the system begins to generate untruthful answers: the inquiry team found that: 'both claimants and social workers were told that payments were "in the post", when subsequent events showed that they could not have been'.

Systemic failure of this kind would be rightly thought intolerable in a financial organisation dealing with the prosperous middle-class. The consequences of such misleading reassurances are naturally much graver for people who are by definition on the brink of destitution.

The upper levels of the DHSS are staffed by humane and intelligent people, and their response to this report is instructive. They are shocked by it. They do not question its local veracity.

Their defence is concentrated upon claiming that the situation illuminated is unusual, perhaps unique: that inner-city areas have very special problems; that Islington's difficulties are sharpened by the presence of radical social workers and active claimants' groups, who are combative and critical in their relations with the DHSS; that their own regular (but unpublished) internal reports suggest that in most parts of the country people have very few complaints about the way the system operates.

To this, a reporter must respond that in public discussion unpublished evidence is not material.

The official defence is then extended to say that the report *cannot* be representative, because if it were 'the whole system would have collapsed by now'. But it is a curious feature of bureaucratic history that people at the apex of an organisation, however benevolent and clever they may be, are sometimes the last ones to notice that it is in truth dead or moribund.

It is a matter of great importance to know whether the Islington breakdown is a little local difficulty, or an early-warning of impending debacle. Clearly, either possibility could be true: the reason for taking the latter more seriously is that the situation described is almost exactly what one would predict from a careful reading of Professor David Donnison's Supplementary Benefits Commission Report, and its analysis of the dramatic changes produced by the advent of the high-unemployment economy.

Like most of our welfare structure, the supplementary benefit system was designed for another era. Aneurin Bevan, introducing its predecessor the national assistance scheme in 1947 – and thinking that he was looking forward to full employment – said that its job would be to rescue 'residual categories' of people not provided for by regular work, contributory national insurance, adequate pensions, sickness benefits and other simple forms of income which derive from right and not from means-test.

'Subsequent Ministers have all taken the view that dependence on the national assistance and supplementary benefits schemes should be reduced', writes Professor Donnison, who together with his fellow-commissioners, is empowered to supervise the system independently of the DHSS which administers it. So far from those ministerial objectives having been achieved, he adds, in the thirty years since Bevan's declaration 'the numbers of those dependent on means-tested assistance have trebled . . .'

In December 1976 about 4.75 million people were relying on supplementary benefits, and 'the most striking features . . . are the way in which the numbers of unemployed people and one-parent families . . . have more than doubled . . .' (There are probably another million people whose poverty would qualify them for benefit, but who remain outside the system through pride or lack of comprehension.)

An unemployment figure running at five or six per cent of the national workforce is underlain by particular situations which are even more dramatic: in inner-city areas and the locations of moribund heavy industry in the north, rates may be three times

* *Cmnd 6910, September 1977.*
** *Joint Review of Relationships Between the Social Services Department of the London Borough of Islington and Local Offices of the DHSS Handling Supplementary Benefits Work. (CMS 1026: ISL 512)*

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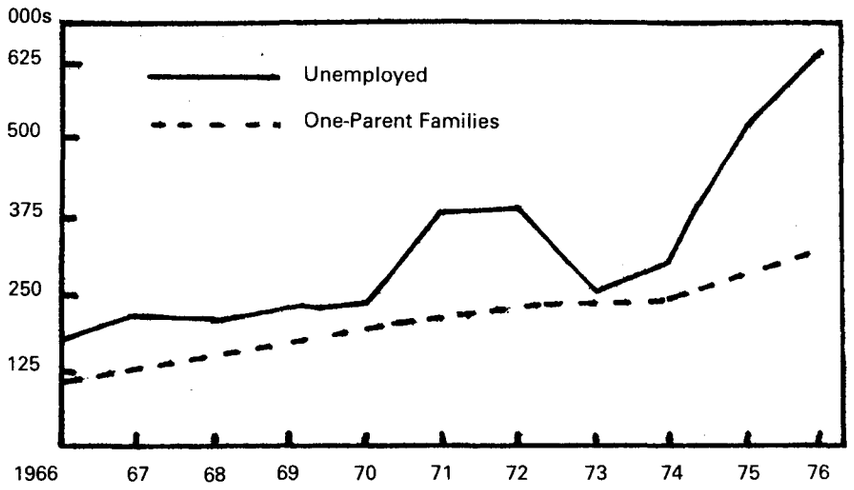

The effect of the two Seventies recessions: dramatic increases in the number of unemployed who have to seek supplementary benefit because they have never been sufficiently in work to build up contributory entitlements. The sharp strain imposed by the unemployed is accompanied by a steady rise in applications from one-parent families. One-parent families also have complex needs, but if it were not for unemployment problems, this work could be made room for by a steady decline – due to pension improvements – in the number of pensioners requiring supplementary benefit assistance. Source: Supplementary Benefits Commission Report 1977

higher. And the characteristics of the non-working population change, so that there are more school-leavers who have never been able to find work, and more people who experience long-term unemployment: thus falling outside the system of insurance benefits which derive from substantial periods in work. (By July 1976 unemployment running to twelve months or more was *ten times* the level in July 1956).

The people thus thrown onto the supplementary benefits scheme – though frequently the unskilled or semi-skilled – are less and less the drop-outs or the unemployable. More and more, they are a cross-section of the ordinary working people of the country.

Of course, to invincible theorists of the Right like Alfred Sherman of the Institute for Policy Studies, or to spokesmen of the 'welfare backlash' in the popular press, there is no such thing as a forcibly unemployed man. This view of the world, one so idealised as to be positively arcane, only requires confronting with a little empirical fact. The extreme case is the North-West, where in the pit of the present recession there were 128 unemployed general labourers for every registered vacancy in that elastic category of work. 'General labourer' is naturally the largest category of unemployed people, but at the same time, across all occupations, the national figure was nine unemployed for every registered vacancy.

The Supplementary Benefit Act empowers the payment of weekly scale rates which allow £27.85 to an unemployed couple with children aged two and four. Theoretically, this is to meet the daily costs of life.

As such, it is dreadfully tight, but not entirely implausible – *so long as unemployment remains merely an interlude, between spells of work during which people can manage to get a little bit in front.* It is a recipe for deprivation in a situation where people must endure unemployment as a way of life. They cannot then manage even those small personal investments which are essential to a decent existence: it comes as no surprise, for instance, to discover that three-fifths of unemployed applicants for supplementary benefit do not have adequate clothing. ('Adequacy' is defined for a man as having 1 overcoat, 1 jacket, 2 pairs of trousers, 3 of socks and 2 of shoes.)

Naturally Parliament and Whitehall are loth to be responsible for the possibility of men, women and children going hungry, unclothed or unshod. This prospect they avoid by a blow of legislative expediency which lobs the whole problem firmly into other hands: those of the staff in DHSS social-security offices, and those of local-authority social workers.

The Supplementary Benefits Act 1976 states that scale rates must apply in order to meet 'normal' needs (which are nowhere defined) unless 'exceptional' needs or circumstances (nowhere defined) are seen to apply, in which case the scale rates don't apply. In addition the Children and Young Persons Act 1963 places on local authorities the responsibility to protect children from destitution, and sanctions payment to their parents in cash or kind should 'exceptional circumstances' be judged to exist.

The British income-maintenance system often gives the impression of having been assembled by Franz Kafka on a gloomy Sunday – especially the wondrous effect in which low-income workers who receive taxpayers' money as Family Income Supplement are generally paying income-tax at the moment they qualify – but these two statutes produce the decisive ambiguities.

The resulting confusion about who does what, and what it should be, is left for the grassroots operatives to sort out between them. Not surprisingly, they have trouble doing so: in Islington one result is shown to be a clear shift of the anti-poverty 'front line', quite against national policy, into the area-team offices of the social workers. The reason is that their professional qualifications give them more freedom, and therefore rapidity of action.

Nationally, the result is the steady clogging of the DHSS system with 'Exceptional Circumstances Additions' (ECAs, cited as having been judged appropriate for additions to rent, hospital visiting, clothing repairs, window-cleaning, petrol to pump water from a well, pocket money for a child at special school, and storage-charges for furniture) and 'Exceptional Needs Payments' (ENPs, cited for prams, funeral expenses, chimney sweeping, installation of meters and cookers, emptying a septic tank, and storage charges for furniture).

Broadly, the regular ECAs are used chiefly to meet heating costs, especially for old people, and ENPs are lump-sum payments to meet particular needs of the unemployed. But the extent of confusion is shown by the fact that the biggest single use of ENPs is now to provide footwear, formerly supposed to have been included in the scale rates. Nothing could be less 'exceptional' than the requirement for baby to have new shoes: confronted by this need, many DHSS officials choose to mistreat the English language rather than the claimant.

The rise of the 'exceptionals' has been accompanied by a large increase in the DHSS supplementary-benefit staff – now two-and-a-half times bigger than the old National Assistance staff – but it has produced only marginal improvements from an applicant's point of view. Exceptional payments increased in number by 38 per cent in three years up to 1976, but added only 2 per cent to the value of benefits.

Dealing, on the cottage-industry scale which was intended, with 'residual categories' of unfortunates would no doubt have been well inside the system's capacities. Dealing with a whole new social class is something else again: for one thing, normal people who cannot reasonably feel guilty about their lack of work are less likely than are willing 'drop-outs' to accept the inadequacy of the long-term provision which society offers them. Likely enough, the real role of the 'discretion' exercised by DHSS officials is to resist a growing pressure from over-the-counter which, left unresisted, would informally rewrite the whole scale of supplementary benefit – their task, at the same time, being to surrender just enough to prevent destitution becoming obvious in the streets.

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expansion is no longer available, it seems eminently likely that the system should be liable to breakdowns of the kind uncovered in Islington. Basically, the report shows an organisation losing track of its affairs.

This is where the 'Catch 22' syndrome arises. Naturally a system dealing extensively in discretionary payments has many clients who are keen to have their ambiguous, and probably frightening situations resolved. Naturally they, together with social workers and other advisers, are likely to ring, write or call to find out what is being done.

But if something *is* being done, that very fact prevents the organisation from saying what it may be. If a useful answer is to be given, the claimant's casepapers must be found. However it is a feature of the DHSS system – not unique to Islington – that when casepapers are 'in action' there is no record of their location. Only 'inactive' papers can be readily traced.

This, no doubt, is the point at which some officials say almost anything to get people off the line. But something even worse happens to the really persistent inquirer.

An official may be persuaded to find the casepapers by personal detection. By this means an accurate progress report may be obtained: the price, however, is a cessation of progress, because the system provides no way of putting the casepapers back in their previous position in the queue.

The system therefore has 'positive feedback': confusion generates more confusion, until relations between claimants and officials become intolerable. Physical and other circumstances scarcely help, such as the oppressive and heavily-protected layout of supplementary-benefit counters, and the fact that DHSS staff work 'flexitime', so that their offices are only likely to be fully manned between 9.30 - 12.00 and 2.00 - 3.30 p.m.

Telephone lines are inadequate, and the report accepts that claimants find it almost impossible to make useful contact from a call-box. Phone calls are rarely returned, and letters from social workers' left unanswered as a rule. Discretionary payments generally depend on a visit to the claimant's home, and at the time of the field-work visiting arrears were standing at four weeks.

The immediate result is what the report calls a 'breakdown of relationships' between the DHSS officials and the local social workers – who find themselves taking on income-maintenance payments under the Children's Act, and trying to recoup for the municipal budget from the Department.

Fairly orthodox suggestions are made for liaison arrangements, which may or may not ameliorate the local situation. But the real question is how local it is. Admittedly, Islington – where I live myself, and where my wife is the outgoing chairman of social services – has a tradition of radical social workers. They are more radical, sometimes, than the local Labour leadership cares for. Admittedly, they have encouraged clients to push their cases vigorously, whereas the Commission's report says that DHSS staff are more sympathetic to 'undemanding' clients. But in view of the Commission's own trenchant criticism of the system, it might be argued that there is something lacking in inner-city areas where social-workers are more passive.

What is most likely is that Islington is exceptional chiefly because its high concentration of urban stresses has produced breakdown a little sooner. It has been suspected for some time that really vigorous campaigning for exceptional payments could 'destabilise' the system: in an action-study at Batley, in Yorkshire, ENPs trebled in value when a small group of claimants were given sophisticated help.*

The Commission considers it 'highly doubtful' that the system could remain viable if 'pressures for welfare rights on the scale experienced in the Batley ENP campaign were to develop in other areas', and Islington looks very like this uneasy prophecy coming to fulfilment.

What reforms are available? Attempts to improve the operational efficiency of the vast clerical armies of the DHSS go back at least to Lord Fulton's unlucky attempt to reform the Civil Service: in the DHSS this took the form of Management by Objectives (MbO), a discipline which in this context has tended to wither without having had very much chance to ripen.

One outside consultant who toiled in this vineyard told me that the crucial difficulty was the refusal of DHSS staff to let management acquire any information on which rigorous 'league tables' of efficiency might be composed. In an area where industrial action can cause instant social disaster, he thought management incapable of taking any step which was seriously opposed by the clerical unions. A similar impression is discreetly conveyed in a paper by one of his official colleagues: 'When Machiaevelli wrote, "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things . . ." he might well have had the MbO project in the DHSS in mind.'†

What is certain is that true reorganisation of the paperwork operation – to meet the needs of a continuing discretionary system – would be regarded by the unions as 'new work', and no doubt as an opportunity to break through the highly unwelcome restraints now imposed on recruitment.

The Supplementary Benefits Review will come out next month with a powerful plea to increase basic scale entitlements, and remove much of the discretion from the system. This might, in theory at least, enable the DHSS to start trimming down and even reforming its bloated organisation. But the question is whether the Government will have the nerve to raise the basic scales substantially. If not, there will simply be more of the social burden of long-term unemployment shifted onto the municipal authorities, who are in no way equipped to handle it.

The temptation will be, once again, to put patches on patches. After thirty years of patching, though, the time for reconstruction has rather obviously arrived.

**Welfare Benefits Advocacy in Batley: Peter Taylor-Gooby April 1977.*
†MbO in her Regional Organisation of the DHSS. R. Walton, Management Services in Government, May 1975.

Letters to the Editor

Watch that Jogger

Sir, I refer to 'Hattersley on Jogging' (NS 31 March). Has any one actually seen him? Do you vouch for the truth of his advertisement? Movement and energy, I doubt not and a certain amount of style also. But can one actually tell what direction he is going in?

BERNARD CRICK

London W11

Defending Menachem Begin

Sir, I welcome your leader's call (NS 31 March) for plain speaking on 'Whose State of Israel?' but by the same token let us also examine some of the fashionable fallacies in your argument. Is the present crisis in Arab-Israel relations really Mr Begin's fault? I submit that this aspersion is demonstrably untrue and the dislike that some people have for Mr Begin is being used deliberately to undermine Israel's vital interests.

Let us imagine that tomorrow Mr Begin's, or for that matter any other Israeli, government gives up every single settlement in Sinai and agrees to withdraw from part of the West Bank – what then? Well, not only the Arab rejectionist states but President Sadat himself has made it abundantly clear that these concessions would be totally inadequate. Nothing less than the surrender of Jerusalem, withdrawal from the *entire* West Bank, and self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs will do.

You, Sir, know full well that neither Mr Eban nor Mr Peres nor any other alternative Israeli Prime Minister could or would accept such capitulationist demands. It is therefore absurd to single out Mr Begin for 'intransigence' when the maximum conceivable concessions that Israel could make are bound to be rejected by her neighbours.

For some time now the top of the Middle Eastern hit parade has been the tune 'Peace is more important than land'. Quite so. Has it ever occurred to you that this little pearl of wisdom is equally applicable to the so called confrontation states? It is not enough to proclaim oneself Israel's candid friend unless some of these elementary truths are understood.

MIA LESLIE-SMITH

London SW7

G. E. Moore and his Brother

Sir, Because of Alan Watkins's evident affection for the Moores, I feel sure that the wrong-headed remarks he makes in his article ('I was G. E. Moore's Lodger', NS 24 March) are merely due to a faulty memory. Dorothy Moore – who died only a few months ago – was very blunt in speech and an inveterate truth-teller. She did dislike Russell, but, like her husband, she was so unworldly that it is inconceivable that 'she was envious of his greater affluence and popular fame compared to Moore'.

Moore had three brothers; of them, he was closest to 'Tom', the poet Sturge Moore. Though he did not care for the publication of Sturge Moore's correspondence with W. B. Yeats, and found the references in it to his own philosophy positively silly, G. E. Moore could hardly have thought this sufficient reason to have 'wanted to kill' his brother. My forth-

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coming book on Moore will confirm the impression of those of his family to whom I have recently spoken, that Moore was fond of Sturge Moore and felt that his intellectual development owed a good deal to him.

As for the matter of the gate-leg table forced upon the Watkins for £10 by Dorothy Moore: she had a connoisseur's eye for English furniture, and Alan Watkins can be certain it was indeed Jacobean. If he still has it, then in spite of his lamented failure to talk much to his philosopher landlord, he will still have profited from his association with Prof. and Mrs G. E. Moore.

PAUL LEVY

Long Hanborough
Oxford

Names Please

Sir, A few additions to Arthur Marshall's piece (NS 31 March) on names: for years there was a firm of solicitors in Thurles in Co. Tipperary in the south of Ireland, called Argue & Phibbs; my father, an income tax man all his working life once told me he had to do business with a firm of tax consultants in Britain – I forget where – and they were Messrs Dunham & Twist. I swear it's true that for years now, in the Public Relations Department of Messrs Arthur Guinness Son & Co. Ltd., (to give them their official title) in Dublin there's been a very decent man called . . . Billy Porter. And if you glance overhead as you walk close to *The Irish Times* main office in D'Olier Street in Dublin you'll see the sign of a man who pierces ladies' ears. His name is proudly displayed in neon as: J. Bite. Finally, for the record, there is in the current Dublin telephone directory a Ms Peps Kola who I gather has gone off the joke.

HENRY KELLY

9 Randolph Crescent
London W9

Jean's Way

Sir, I appreciate Anthony Howard's reservation and unease (NS 24 March) about Derek Humphrey's book. But before the file is closed on this particular type of human tragedy – until the next time – may I put forward my views on one aspect of the situation that to my knowledge has not yet been discussed? It is my contention that by the time Mr Humphrey kept his pact with his dying wife he cannot have been of sound mind. Just a day or so before the TV interviews (and I share in the distaste for the presentation) I listened to a brilliantly written account on the radio of a woman in Ireland in a similar situation. She had had to watch her 8-year old son fight what had been diagnosed as terminal cancer. This story had a surprisingly happy ending but was no less harrowing for that. At one point, left alone in the room with the sick child, she had contemplated throwing him out of the window to end his misery. She resisted the temptation – not because of the ethics – but because she was not sure that the drop would kill! Such thoughts from a loving mother – the road to madness!

I know women are accused of reducing every argument to the personal and I am no exception for it is only from personal experience that I would make so harsh a judgment. I was not called upon to take the final step but looking back to the state of miind I was in at that time I think I was quite capable of it. At this stage the person concerned has endured weeks or months of lack of sleep, strain, heartache, the worry of financial stringency if not complete ruin, and is quite incapable of making a valid judgment about anything. There is no light at the end of the tunnel – only the knowledge that relief and release will come through death and out of this extreme of fatigue comes a God-like euphoria where all seems possible and rational.

And when this point has been reached, that person should be removed from all but minimal or supervised access to the dying partner or child. This would seem a cruel and callous act at a time when these two people only want to be left alone with each other. But while the one will die the other will eventually have to step back from the edge of the grave and rejoin the human race and will never be able to make a full recovery if left to fight this battle alone.

And so I come to Anthony Howard's point that death, the great unmentionable as he puts it, is the concern of us all. Why should I bother you with my views on this – long ago Donne said it all when he wrote the words 'Send not to know . . . '

If Derek Humphrey's excuse for his revelation is that the law on helping suicide should be rescinded, mine is that murder by compassion should not be made acceptable but rather made impossible. If not the law will finally have to step in (if only to discourage the others) and make a tragic situation more tragic by prosecution. Long before this point in the illness – somebody – relatives, social workers, our hard pressed doctors and nurses – just somebody – should step in and take over.

Meantime for people like Mr Humphrey and myself and the others the scars remain.

M. N. WELLWOOD

Rearquhar
Dornoch
Sutherland

Help Stamp Out Uranium

Sir, I am raising funds for a campaign to counter the propaganda of the so-called Uranium Producers' Forum in Australia, a body which is really a Uranium Producers' Lobby, and which spends huge sums on dubious propaganda in favour of uranium mining. An almost painless way in which your readers could help this campaign would be for them to send me used postage stamps of all types and denominations. They should be sent to 'Anti-Uranium Campaign', c/o L. Drake, 178 Stratton Terrace, Manly, 4179, Australia.

I hope you can find space for this letter in the interests of our posterity.

LARRY DRAKE

Manly NSW
Australia

Chuck it, Johnson

Sir, Your contributor R. W. Johnson writes (NS 17 March): 'Until now many of us had (*sic*) been fooled by photographs depicting (Chuck) Connors as a diminutive tennis star . . . ' I reckon quite a few of us know that there's a tall American film-actor called Chuck Connors. I'll bet even more of us know that the tennis player's name is Jimmy. Still, Johnson's got it partly right: one person at least has been fooled. And he just had to go and make it public.

J. F. BOLTON

Ashgard
Co. Wicklow
Eire.

For 'Harry', read 'Truman'

Sir, In repayment for Gore Vidal's admirable review of Cecil Beaton's *The Parting Years* (NS 17 March), I am pleased to lighten his darkness concerning what Beaton and Harry Truman had to say to each other in New York. The answer is, nothing. Beaton's Truman is, in fact, none other than Mr Vidal's esteemed contemporary, Truman Capote. What did *they* talk about? Ah . . .

BRIAN ANDREWS

Fambridge Road
Dagenham
Essex

About Oxford books

Happy Birthday to Us

'Only one printing press in the world is 500 years old. Only one has been in a university since the fifteenth century, printing and publishing. Only one is the biggest concern of its kind in the world. We are talking, of course, of that august and somewhat intimidating institution, Oxford University Press.'

Thus Margaret Lane in the *Daily Telegraph*. The august institution can perhaps be forgiven for feeling pleased with itself this year, for a 500th birthday really is rather special. Celebrations are under way: last month a major exhibition opened at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York; yesterday another – 'Printing and Publishing in Oxford – The Growth of a Learned Press' – opened at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. It includes portraits, letters, documents, manuscripts, proofs, and printing equipment, as well as books. Among the books is the first classical text printed in England (a Cicero of 1480), the earliest illustrated Oxford book (1487), the earliest Oxford printed arithmetic book (1519), the first catalogues of the Bodleian Library (1605) and of the Botanic Garden (1648), the first Oxford Bible (1675), the oldest Russian grammar (1696), the early works on mosses (1741), electricity (1752), and the use of sea water in diseases of the glands (1753).

Five hundred years after it all began, on 23 March 1978, we published two new books: books about ourselves – 'two splendid books', according to Margaret Lane. One is Nicolas Barker's **The Oxford University Press and the Spread of Learning: An Illustrated History** ('A handsome picture book'); the other is Peter Sutcliffe's **The Oxford University Press: An Informal History** – an entertainingly readable as well as minutely informative account of the Press's 19th and 20th century enterprise which is still responsible for most of the world's bibles, for spreading the English language all over the globe, and for publishing a vast body of both learned and literary matter without which it would be difficult to imagine a civilised existence.'

'Both books', she continues, 'would satisfy the perfectionist requirements of Charles Batey, the mid-20th century Printer to the University. "The type", he wrote, "should be legible and well inked; the paper should be opaque . . . kindly to the eye, and pleasant to the touch; and the leaves should be secured in a safe binding . . . The whole should be of convenient weight, not burdensome; the book should open easily, and without alarms and crackles, and lie quite flat." How few books would meet with his approval nowadays!'

People are saying very nice things about us this year. We are grateful to them. We close this birthday column with a remark of Philip Howard's. Writing in *The Times* earlier this year, he said: 'The Oxford University Press is our greatest stable of books. But its greatness resides not just in size and numbers of books, which have made the imprint a familiar badge of learning from China to Peru. It lies in the Press's persistent and noble belief that truth, and scholarship, and good books matter more than profit.'

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BOOKS IN GENERAL

James Fenton

Nostalgie de la Guerre

Dispatches by MICHAEL HERR *Picador* £1.25

I never saw the Vietnam War – not the thing Michael Herr is talking about. I saw Vietnam, and the last stages of a war there. But that was something different. In that war, Vietnamese were fighting Vietnamese. In Mr Herr's war, Americans were fighting gooks. The American side of the thing was glamorous, manly, absorbing. The gooks' side was of no interest whatsoever. The enemy gooks were of no interest; the 'friendly' gooks were of no interest. Here is one of the rare occasions when Mr Herr describes a live gook:

> In Broddards and La Pagode and the pizzeria around the corner, the Cowboys and Vietnamese 'students' would hang out all day, screaming obscure arguments at each other, cadging off Americans, stealing tips from the tables, reading Pléiade editions of Proust, Malraux, Camus. One of them talked to me a few times but we couldn't really communicate, all I understood was his obsessive comparison between Rome and Washington, and that he seemed to believe Poe had been a French writer.

Note first the inverted commas around 'students' – as if it was incredible that the gooks might actually study. Next, the word 'obscure'. The arguments were obscure, I suggest, only because they were in gook language. And now the man with whom Mr Herr was unable to communicate – what a tantalising glimpse we have of him. Imagine what Graham Greene would have made out of his excellent comparison between Rome and Washington. Nor is the notion that Poe was a French writer so ridiculous – Poe was a French cult-figure, after all. Shit (as Mr Herr would say), if it hadn't been for the Frogs, would anyone still be taking Poe seriously?

Well, that was Mr Herr's chance of talking to a Vietnamese, and he passed it up. It wasn't what he'd come to Vietnam to do. What he was interested in was the war, which he calls 'the most profound event of the American decade'. For him, as for a great number of journalists, it was an American show, and he wanted to be in on it. It wasn't that he wanted to *fight* the war exactly (although in a way he was tempted). It wasn't that he believed in its purpose (although he took much of that for granted). It was simply that he wanted to be around. He was an amateur war-freak.

War-freaks were common as muck in Indochina. I knew one who was killed in Cambodia. As luck would have it, a Swedish open-heart surgeon was near by, and brought the fellow back to life. I felt rather guilty during the time of his convalescence – poor chap, he'd died, better be nice to him in future. But the fact that he had died did not stop him being a war-freak, and as soon as he was on his feet he returned to the front line. He was a professional. The amateur war-freak, if killed, would have called it a day.

The amateurs adored and adulated the professionals. Mr Herr fell under the spell of Sean Flynn, the actor who went to Vietnam as a photographer and got so deeply 'into' the war that he had more or less given up taking photographs by the time he disappeared in Cambodia. Flynn, we learn,

> could look more incredibly beautiful than even his father, Errol, had 30 years before as Captain Blood, but sometimes he looked more like Artaud coming out of some heavy heart-of-darkness trip, overloaded on the information, the input! The input! He'd give off a bad sweat and sit for hours, combing his moustache through with the saw-blade of his Swiss Army knife.

How perfectly revolting. Indeed, everything I have ever heard about Flynn and his set strikes me as thoroughly unpleasant. They were boring, spaced-out sadists hitching a lift with Murder. Nor do I believe Mr Herr's claim that

> just hearing the way Flynn pronounced the word 'Vietnam', the tenderness and respect that he put into it, taught you more about the beauty and the horror of the place than anything the apologists or explainers could do.

So there was Flynn and Dana Stone (who also eventually disappeared in Cambodia) and Perry Dean Young (who has written a similar book glorifying Flynn) and Tim Page. Page (they'd always 'say his name with great affection. "Page. Fucking Page" ') was severely wounded several times, and eventually packed it in when paralysed. A British publisher approached him with the idea of writing a book which would once and for all 'take the glamour out of war'. Page 'couldn't get over it':

> Take the glamour out of war! I mean how the bloody hell can you do that? Go and take the glamour out of a Huey, go take the glamour out of a Sheridan . . . Can you take the glamour out of a Cobra or getting stoned on China Beach? It's like taking the glamour out of an M79, taking the glamour out of Flynn.

This book has been earnestly praised. On the jacket alone there are comparisons with Dante, Jimi Hendrix, *All Quiet on the Western Front,* Crane, Orwell, Hemingway, Frank Zappa and Francis Bacon. Robert Stone is quoted: 'I believe it may be the best journal about war, about any war, that any writer has ever accomplished.' John le Carré: 'The best book I have ever read about men and war in our time.' I am not surprised at Le Carré, whose infatuation with war correspondents appears to have completely warped his own artistic judgment in his latest novel. But it does seem strange that this appallingly written book should have been generally seen as outstanding.

Just as there is all the difference in the world between a professional and a conscript soldier at war, so there is all the difference between the attitude and perceptions of the soldier and the war-freak. They may be in the same place, at the same time, suffering in the same way. But they are there for entirely different reasons. If the soldier tells you that the war is for him the height of glamour, that may or may not be surprising. If the war-freak tells you the same thing, it is banal. What the war-freak wants is to come back to the hotel with mud on his boots and blood on his fatigues, and pass out in a haze of dope and self-congratulation. This is the way Mr Herr spent his time in Vietnam. What he was itching to do was to use a gun and get away with it. This is a common ambition, and Mr Herr was fortunate enough to achieve it:

> But of course we were intimate and I'll tell you how intimate: they were my guns, and I let them do it . . . We covered each other, an exchange of services that worked all right until one night when I slid over to the wrong end of the story, propped up behind some sandbags at an airstrip in Can Tho with a .30-calibre automatic in my hands, giving cover for a four-man reaction team trying to get back in. One last war story.
>
> The first night of the Tet Offensive we were in the Special Forces C Camp for the Delta, surrounded as far as we knew, and with nothing but bad news filtering in: from Hue, from Danang . . . from Saigon itself, 'lost' as we understood it at that moment, they had the embassy, they had Cholon, Tan Son Nhut was burning, we were in the Alamo, no place else, and I wasn't a reporter, I was a shooter.

In the morning there were a dozen Vietnamese dead in the area where Mr Herr had been firing. This was a great moment for Mr Herr – perhaps the reason he didn't go for talking to gooks was because he was much more interested in shooting them. As he tells us of that moment, he couldn't know for sure whether he'd killed anyone, but 'I couldn't remember ever feeling so tired, so changed, so happy'. He wasn't a reporter for *Esquire.* He was a shooter for *Esquire.*

Among this week's contributors:

DAVID DAICHES retired from the Chair of English at the University of Sussex last year. His book on Edinburgh is to be published this summer by Hamish Hamilton.

A. N. WILSON's new novel *Unguarded Hours* is to be published by Secker & Warburg later this month.

MAX BELOFF is the Principal of University College at Buckingham. Among his more recent publications are *The Future of British Foreign Policy,* and *The Intellectual in Politics.*

MAURICE RICHARDSON is the author of *The Exploits of Engelbrecht: A Surrealist Sportsman's Sketches,* recently re-issued by John Conquest (Box JC, Compendium, 234 Camden High Street, London NW1).

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PETER TAUBER

The Last Best Hope

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JERZY KOSINSKI

Blind Date

'It is so perfectly written, so dynamically conceived, that BLIND DATE is destined to become Kosinski's biggest critical and commercial success in his career as a novelist.' Los Angeles Times. £4.95

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'A dazzling debut in a field which has long lacked an intellectual and comic practitioner. . . It works on all levels. . . At once a parody, a critique and a challenge to the traditional detective story.' Alan Brien, Sunday Times. £4.50

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'The imaginative perception of character and the vigour of her diologue show Margaret Blount to be a writer of unmistakable talent.' The Times.
'An acutely alert and witty writer, in dialogue, in phrase making and indeed in the Chinese-box-building of her plot.' Observer. £4.95

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'A powerful intelligent novel about the discord between father and son . . . gracefully written with drama, irony, insight.' Chicago Daily News. £4.95

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David Daiches

The Struggling Burglars

Drummer Hodge: The Poetry of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) by M. VAN WYK SMITH *Oxford* £9.50

The first world war in large measure wiped out in Britain the memories and the legends of the Boer War, which had ended only a dozen years before. Those memories included a deep sense of guilt, for even the most enthusiastic jingoist verse in favour of the war – and there was plenty of that – displayed by its sometimes hysterical violence an underlying uneasiness and uncertainty which other poets – Kipling in his 'Recessional', for example, or Stephen Phillips in his 'Midnight, 31st December 1900' – expressed more directly.

There were not only guilt feelings: there was downright hostility to the war shown by a significant minority of British intellectuals and of the British press. The Boer War was significant not only for this: it was also the first war waged by Britain in which literacy was widespread among the ranks. As Mr Van Wyk Smith says,

> While literacy was almost non-existent in the ranks and rare even among non-commissioned officers in the Peninsular War, the men who went to South Africa in 1899 were the products of several decades of universal literacy and franchise.

The Boer War therefore produced war poetry (or at least war verse) written by ordinary private soldiers as well as by officers and gentlemen and by poets at home. As an anonymous journalist wrote in 1900:

> Never before has Britain sent forth to the battlefield so large a force of men sufficiently educated to write home. The war, therefore, has been described from day to day, not like all other wars, by professional journalists or by literary officers, but by the rank and file.

A surprising amount of this description was in verse.

Professional journalists of course were not lacking, and they described the war rather differently from the soldiers. Masses of enthusiastic correspondents in the field telegraphed their vivid and sometimes highly coloured stories home and helped to keep the public involved and excited. As a writer in *Blackwood's* put it in February 1900: 'Had Wellington fought with a mob of correspondents and a telegraph-wire at his back, he would never have survived Torres Vedras.'

These were respects in which the Boer War differed from all previous wars fought by Britain. In one important respect, however, the Boer War resembled all the other major conflicts since the Civil War: they were all fought by expeditionary forces operating out of sight of the people at home. Nevertheless, the relation between the battle front and the home front represented something previously unknown. As well as the factors mentioned, there was the powerful effect of what Van Wyk Smith calls 'music-hall belligerence'. The music hall produced masses of crudely jingoistic songs. And it was at music-hall recitations that Kipling's poem 'The Absent-Minded Beggar' raised £340,000 for war charities. But Kipling's war poems, as Van Wyk Smith shows in an interesting chapter on the subject, were more complicated and in some respects more self-contradictory than the normal music-hall songs which set a pattern of patriotic poetry copied by some verse-writing soldiers. There were also numerous imitators of Kipling as well as ironic parodies by 'pro-Boer' poets. Opposition to the war produced not only parodies, such as those by T. W. Crossland, but serious poems of pity and irony, such as Crossland's 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori', which suggests Wilfred Owen and may have been known to him.

Van Wyk Smith makes clear, with frequent quotation, that there was abundant critical and ironical war poetry produced, both at home and in South Africa and elsewhere, by the Boer War in addition to the masses of jingoistic verse. This was partly because the Hague Peace Conference, concluded three months before the outbreak of war,

> provided the organisational framework for the feminist, radical, socialist, and humanitarian groups all over Europe that mounted a massive international protest against the Anglo-Boer War, thus preparing a growth-culture for the largest body of anti-war poetry that any war to date had produced.

Another reason was the image of the Boer as a simple, honest, courageous, God-fearing farmer facing the sophisticated might of a huge empire dominated by financial interests. William Watson in his poem 'The Enemy' gave typical expression to what Van Wyk Smith calls 'the rural myth woven round the Boers':

> Unskilled in Letters, and in Arts unversed;
> Ignorant of empire; bounded in their view
> By the lone billowing veldt, where
> they upgrew
> Amid great silences; a people nursed
> Apart – the far-sown seed of them that erst
> Not Alva's sword could tame: now,
> blindly hurled
> Against the march of the majestic world,
> They fight and die, with dauntless
> bosoms curst.

Many socialist writers saw the war as a straight fight between capitalist imperialism and rural simplicity, but few considered the black Africans. H. M. Hyndman was an exception here, defining the war as 'a struggle between two burglars . . . The country belongs neither to Boer nor to Briton . . . The future of South Africa is, I believe, to the black man.' Such a view is not reflected in any of the war poetry; the blacks were simply not involved.

The pathos of the British soldier fighting a war 6,000 miles from home in a cause he does not understand is most fully expressed in Hardy's 'Drummer Hodge', but other poets reflected a similar attitude. The Boer poets, whom Van Wyk Smith quotes liberally, produced for the most part simple and sometimes moving accounts of tenacity, outrage, despair, suffering and death. The outside world was almost solidly pro-Boer. In America the familiar anti-imperialist theme was often combined with admiration for the tough and rough Boer farmers whom Americans, especially in the Midwest and South, tended to see in the light of their own frontier tradition. Germany was solidly pro-Boer, but it was France that produced some of the most bitter pro-Boer and anti-British poetry, much of which 'centre on the idealised image of the two republics as rural utopias'. German pro-Boer poetry revealed 'the epic view of the Boers as Germanic prototypes locked in a struggle for racial survival', and we are given some powerful examples of this view expressed in verse.

There were contradictions galore in the attitudes expressed by poets, versifiers and publicists throughout the Boer War. Van Wyk Smith notes that

> the contradictory enthusiasms for pacifism and militarism so prominent in these years was (*sic*) only part of a much larger, fundamental clash between a liberal, humanitarian 'decadence' on the one hand, and a reactionary, aggressive activism on the other.

But the paradox went deeper than this. The tough, fundamentalist, black-despising Boer could be seen as a 'reactionary, aggressive activist' as easily as the British imperialists, while it was the aggressively imperialist British who were regularly accused by many in the Boer camp of being rotted by a soft liberalism. The pro-Boer, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist versifiers were often anti-Semitic and, in particular, anti-Dreyfus. The whole situation, indeed, is remarkably complex and Van Wyk Smith's book, while it does not probe all the complexities, provides a fascinating account of a subject about which most of us have very simplified ideas.

Maurice Richardson

Admirations

Electric Delights by WILLIAM PLOMER edited by Rupert Hart Davis *Cape* £6.95

William Plomer, who died in 1973, was a most interesting, attractive and versatile writer – novelist, poet and critic – with one of those restrained yet pervasive quince-like personalities. He was very observant and had a sharp eye for the grotesque and the absurd. Naturally there are several good things in this collection of his miscellaneous pieces and you can have a pleasant eclectic peck over them, like a jackdaw at a wake. I wish, though, that his friend Rupert Hart Davis hadn't neglected the cardinal prin-

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ciple: always assume your reader is ignorant. He should have given us a biographical sketch or at least some skeletal facts on which to reconstruct. As it is, all we get in his wispy introduction are sidelong references to what's left out – 'similarly I have omitted all his occasional writings on South Africa and Japan since he has said his say on these countries in prose and verse'. It's especially frustrating in Plomer's case because his life-style was an unusual one. *Double Lives* was the significant title of his autobiography. I will orientate myself by a brief recap.

He was born in 1903 of English parents who lived in South Africa. He went to Rugby, returned to South Africa, edited a literary magazine with Roy Campbell, was a trader in Zululand. He much esteemed the Zulus, though he was too civilised a person to go the whole hog with Rider Haggard's mentor, Sir Theophilus Shenstone, who thought we should never have fought the Zulu war, or not, anyway, until the Zulus had had a chance to exterminate the Boers. He spent two years in Japan and in 1929 settled in England where Leonard and Virginia Woolf introduced him to Bloomsbury, which he found very much to his taste. I suppose his best-known novel is *The Case is Altered,* though I've always had a soft spot for *Sado* (1931), about the fugitive relationship between a young Englishman and a Japanese boy student. He also wrote an excellent life of Cecil Rhodes.

The best things in this book are to be found among the 'Admirations', notably of the prose writers. Plomer is an excellent critic, most conscientious. He never cuts capers or strains after contemporary analogies. He can let himself go in a burst of enthusiasm but he keeps his head. You can learn a lot from him. He winds up a properly fervent appreciation of *Moby Dick* and its symbolic mysteries with a comparison of Melville with Whitman which concludes:

> The greatness and the limitations of both these writers are bound up with that moral earnestness and absolute lack of a sense of humour which marked them both and which may perhaps be ascribed to the Dutch blood in the veins of both of them.

Plomer's South African background had given him experience of some of the murkier aspects of the Dutch national character. He makes use of it when considering the Dutch novelist Louis Couperus (1863-1923), of whose *The Hidden Force,* a social tragedy of colonial life in Java, he gives an impressive account.

One of the nicest and longest pieces in the book is the article on Edward Fitzgerald, for whom, Plomer points out, the enigmatic 'thou' singing in the wilderness was a tobacco-chewing North Sea fisherman nicknamed Posh. Delightful is his story of Fitzgerald's marriage to brawny Lucy Barton, which didn't last much beyond the wedding breakfast when he only spoke once. 'This was when he was offered some blancmange, which he waved away in disgust saying as he did so: "Ugh! Congealed bridesmaid!" ' (Incidentally, Fitzgerald does seem to have had some genuine interest in butches, for he wrote to a friend that he was contemplating christening his new herring-lugger Marian Halcomb. She, you may remember, was the gallant, faintly mustachioed joint-heroine of *The Woman in White.*) Far from making a mock of Fitzgerald, Plomer gives you a sympathetic study of him in some depth, together with a just estimate of the much maligned *Rubaiyat,* hackneyed through no fault of Fitzgerald's, any more than were 'those horrible little editions about the size of a patience card and bound in floppy suede of the colour that Herbert Spencer calls "impure purple" '. (Trust Plomer to spot these.) Other subjects are Gissing, of whom he writes so lucidly that he dispels for me the shroud of depression with which generations of prankster-bookmen have festooned this admittedly sad yet fascinating figure. Also Francis Kilvert, the 19th-century Wiltshire parson whose wonderfully vivid diary he introduced, paying due attention to his Betjemanic passion – 'half erotic, half religious . . . a sort of Pre-Raphaelite rhapsody' – for very young dairymaids. Betjeman himself (nothing about his Dutch origin, though) is one of his 'Admirations' among the poets. These include Christina Rossetti; Cafavy; Charles Tennyson Turner; and Thomas Pringle (1789-1834), declared by Coleridge to be 'the author of the two or three most perfect lyric poems in our language'. Among Plomer's own eight poems, printed in this book, is his occasional poem on the death of Martin Luther King, and a tribute to Cecil Day Lewis. His sardonic black-farcical vein, as in 'The Dorking Thigh', is not represented.

What else do we get? There's a special section on Benjamin Britten, with particular reference to *Gloriana,* for which Plomer wrote the libretto; and his 'Church Operas' which, due in part to Plomer's prompting, were influenced by the Japanese No plays. The light, dry side of Plomer, a very characteristic one, is illustrated by 'An Alphabet of Literary Prejudice'. Examples:

> CONTROVERSIAL writings are apt to be a great bore . . . 'EVERYBODY can write one good book' is one of the most idiotic sayings imaginable . . . LOG-ROLLING is regarded as a reprehensible exercise by persons who have no logs of their own to roll, or not enough strength to roll other people's logs. QUEENIE'S WHIM is a title I cannot forget. It is the title of a novel I do not expect or want to read. The novel was by Ross Nouchette Carey, whose readers must now be fewer than they were.

There is a reprinted broadcast 'Conversation With My Younger Self', which reads a bit ponderously, as these exercises are apt to do. I'm far from wild about the two short stories, the funny one about the prog household and the Firbankian one about Miss Bourbon-Hapsburg. Both seem rather laboured. But in the topographical section there is a seaside sketch featuring an encounter, in brilliant dialogue, with Elsie, a splendid specimen of what the Americans call jailbait. 'There was some reason for thinking her a halfwit, and some for thinking her less of one than she seemed.' In general, *Electric Delights* is most successful as a demonstration of versatility, well worth reading for itself and also as a posthumous phosphorescent lure which sends you back to its author's solider work.

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Peter Conrad

All the Rage

The Act of Being by CHARLES MAROWITZ *Secker & Warburg* £6.50

Marowitz is an inverted bowdler. Editors used to cut Shakespeare's plays to make them respectable; now directors cut them, fracture them as Marowitz does into inane collages, in order to make them unrespectable. Bowdler removed lubricious wordplay from the texts; Nahum Tate sentimentally palliated the tragedy, supplying *Lear* with a happy ending. But the modern theatre requires *Lear* to be more rather than less harrowing: hence Edward Bond's version, emphasising a fanatical ideological cruelty, or Peter Brook's production, which suppressed compassionate details like the sympathy of the servants for the blinded Gloucester. The versions of Shakespeare presented by Marowitz at the Open Space were similarly cases of interpretative vandalism: he accelerated *Hamlet* into a frantic 20 minutes, and smudged the problematic character of the hero into a 'mythic smear'; he transposed *Othello* to the American urban ghetto, and made the Moor a toadying Uncle Tom who is punished by Iago for his racial treachery.

But Shakespeare survives – indeed invites – such deformations, and Marowitz is one of the most illuminating of Shakespeare's interpreters because his hypotheses are almost all outlandish enough to match Shakespeare's own anarchic infinitude of implication. The rehearsal exercises he prescribes in *The Act of Being* delight in a wilful perversity of characterisation. He recommends, for instance, that Lady Macbeth should be played as a menopausal suburban housewife. But in doing so he shocks the text into giving up one of its secrets: Lady Macbeth is, in fact, more a suburban housewife than the banshee of stage convention. Her anxieties are all domestic: to hustle a laggard husband into his nightgown, to scrub her hands scrupulously. Murders are apportioned as household chores, to be performed in tandem. Macbeth kills Duncan, but wants his wife to kill the grooms; it's as if they were disputing whose turn it was to wash and whose to dry.

Marowitz's assaults on Shakespeare are Shakespearean in spirit because their conjectural audacity rivals Shakespeare's own roguishness. Shakespearean drama incites an uprising of the subplot against the heroic action: the fool twits the demented Lear, the self-serving Falstaff derides Lancastrian chivalry. Marowitz completes the subversion by inciting a rebellion of the subtext against the official action of the script. For him the recess of meaning lies between or beneath the lines, and in their secret realm, which the director excavates, characters do undergo alarming changes, and metamorphose into their opposites: you can, as Marowitz wishes, 'play Othello as if he were Doll Tearsheet' or 'Shylock as if he were Henry V' if you attend to the injunctions of the subtext.

Marowitz himself, according to the memoir which introduces *The Act of Being*, is something of a Shakespearean character, a self-inventor like Falstaff who has devised a profession for himself by transforming his incapacity with expertise. Having failed grotesquely at drama schools in New York and London, he proceeded to establish his own acting school, like the pusillanimous Falstaff making profits from conscripting others: 'I started as a charlatan, invented my own tuition, put highly personal constructions on half-a-dozen half-baked ideas . . . and came up with a *modus operandi*.' Marowitz's directional techniques are the reflex of his own witty exuberance. His exercises for actors are routines of comic virtuosity: he has them choreographically miming the punctuation marks in a Shakespearean soliloquy, or advises his Iago to chatter as if rattling off Rossinian patter. It is this feckless imagination which couldn't be contained by Strasberg's Method, which (for Marowitz) takes its visceral antics too seriously. In comparison with the extravagant exhibitionism which Marowitz elicits from his performers, the egotism of the Method actors is niggardly and their emotional range mean. The Method, as Marowitz argues, encourages its practitioners to reduce their roles to fit their own neuroses, and they end not by communicating an emotion but by mumbling incoherently to themselves like Brando or James Dean.

The Act of Being is as much a collage as one of Marowitz's Shakespeare cut-ups. It is in part a theoretical tract and in part a shamefacedly mawkish rhapsody, including a lamentable blank-verse prayer for actors. It is partly a notebook (it prints journals describing work on Marowitz's *An Othello* and on the 'Theatre of Cruelty' project) and partly an ironic memoir. But its various forms coincide: the memoir, for instance, illuminates theatrical history by suggesting that the abandonment of the Method was a consequence of Marowitz's move from New York to London. His disaffection from the Method is a measure of his anglicisation. Method suits the American cult of authenticity, since it dramatises the morbid, truculent complaints of the ego. It is an extracurricular psychotherapy which 'persuades an actor that the sincerity of his feeling and the truthfulness of his actions are all that is required in the creation of art'. In America, a querulous subjectivity – the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of unhappiness – is guaranteed by the constitution. Marowitz admires British actors because they make art not out of their insecurity and inarticulacy but out of their superb confidence. They are not rampaging egos but immaculate social beings. They specialise in mimicking an emotion which their American colleagues fret and strain actually to feel. Marowitz's work has been to unsettle this lazy British ease, and he treats actors as brutally as he treats texts: he once made a Hamlet curl into the foetal position, then sewed him into a sack, and finally locked the sack in a wardrobe closet. But his rage is always creative, and we ought to be grateful for the damage he has done to our national monuments.

Jeremy Treglown

Acting Up

The History of the National Theatre by JOHN ELSOM and NICHOLAS TOMALIN *Cape* £8.50

Setting aside the pros and cons of principle, and in the case of the cons this isn't easy, there are several practical objections to the National Theatre. The most obvious is that, by the time it was at last built, almost every need it was historically intended to supply had been met elsewhere. One of the things made very clear by this excellent book is that since the war the history of the National Theatre has also been the history of the national theatre. One by one, demands and ambitions thwarted in the project's early days were satisfied in other quarters. George Devine left the Old Vic to start up the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. Gielgud, Redgrave, Richardson and Olivier moved in turn to Stratford, helping it build the reputation (and the capital) of a national company in its own right. Tyrone Guthrie emigrated to found the open-stage theatre at Stratford, Ontario, which inspired – if that's the word – the Festival Theatre at Chichester. And when the NT had started operating but still lacked a new building, one profitable season financed yet another scheme, the Young Vic.

Supposing there was still room, though, for what became in effect *another* National Theatre, the question remains of whether the current goings-on are endemic to it, or just to Peter Hall's regime. Productions on the South Bank so far have mostly been dull in choice or execution, or both. They have also been scandalously wasteful, a fact whose historical irony is shrewdly noted by John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin. As well as giving a full account of the cheeseparing, community-orientated origins of the NT in Emma Cons's Old Vic, they point out that another of its founders, Harley Granville-Barker, conceived the then novel idea of a multi-auditoria theatre specifically as a way of making the fullest economic use of a company's resources. Now, the National recently paid what was supposed to be a tribute to Barker by staging his play *The Madras House*, and among the dismaying rumours about Hall's ways with his £2½m. annual subsidy is one concerning that production. Can it be true that one actor joined the National company for the period May 1977 to February 1978 at a salary of more than £800 a month, solely to play a supporting role in *The Madras House* for a monthly average of less than eight performances? (I don't mention the actor's name because it is not his fault; but his employer may reflect that the total payment involved is about the sum the Arts Council is now scraping together to rescue an entire repertory theatre in Newcastle.)

This very typical story is too recent for the book, though Elsom and Tomalin are by no means sparing with other damaging information and rightly give a lot of space

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to the circumstances surrounding Michael Blakemore's sad resignation in 1976. All the same, the whole account is doggedly fair, and steers its way tactfully and very knowledgeably through committees, reports and statistics, as well as personal friendships and rows. There are times when the broader background-sketching seems patronising (the book, like its subject, suffers from being aimed abroad: we learn that Chichester is a small town in Sussex, *Private Eye* a satirical magazine); and it has to be admitted that there are longueurs. Elsom wrote or re-wrote all but the lively first chapter, using his own research in addition to the extensive materials gathered and completed by Tomalin before his death, and he has in the process contributed not only to knowledge but to the world's fund of bad prose, particularly in the departments of mixed metaphor, cliché and girlish cries. I especially liked the idea of the musical *Tyger* having 'caught the tail-end of a flower-power fashion, and tripped over it' and the little shriek in a footnote halfway through, 'Yes, well, we all know what a tease Randolph was!'

For all this, it's an important, comprehensive study, and one which is particularly useful for its coverage of what is arguably the NT's best claim for support: its machinery. The theatre has the most sophisticated equipment in Britain and in some respects in the world, and the book describes it exceptionally well, making interesting narrative sense – as Elsom has done before in *Theatre Outside London* – of complex technical specifications. Not all audiences want elaborate spectacle, and not all writers and directors use it. But plenty do, including some of our better and younger dramatists. If the National resembles Concorde in other less appealing ways, what it represents in technological terms is made to seem comparably exhilarating.

Jonathan Keates

Stair-ril-la-ta

Henry Irving and the Victorian Theatre by MADELEINE BINGHAM *George Allen & Unwin* £7.50

Few things can be more embarrassing to the non-stagestruck than the prominence into which recent cultural trends have thrown the common player. We are used by now to those dire interviews, accompanied by rehearsal pics full of the slaggy glamour of jeans and sweat, in which the dedicated histrion warbles admiration for the director's professionalism, or successfully mimics commitment to her Shakespearean role – 'There's an awful lot of *me* in Lady Macbeth'. I recall with a shudder an appalling television programme in which Vanessa Redgrave, the late Edith Evans and others were asked to comment on pieces of film featuring great actors of the past at work. Tiny snatches of forgettable star-vehicles showed Duse, Bernhardt and Gerald Du Maurier attitudinising madly; the real performance was taking place in the studio, as each modern celebrity went into a 'being serious' routine and talked urgently about timing and facial expression. Goldsmith's last words on Garrick were seldom truer:

> On stage he was natural, easy, affecting:
> 'Twas only that when he was off he
> was acting.

Henry Irving is one of the *monstres sacrés* of such specious theatrical romance. Almost singlehanded he changed the actor's status from that of a gifted servant to the role of a human pekingese, lolling vacuously in the dogbasket of adulation. His career is a paradigm of success snatched from adversity, and it is one of Madeleine Bingham's signal virtues that she does nothing to romanticise the intense, slogging dreariness of Irving's early years. Given his natural disadvantages, it was a wonder he ever got on to the stage at all. He had spindly legs, a weak, reedy voice whose diction seems to have grown more mannered with the years (one critic carefully noted his pronunciation of sterility, as 'stair-ril-la-ta') and there was his name, John Brodribb, hardly such stuff as dreams are made on, and dropped as soon as he took to the boards.

He was also singleminded, versatile and resilient in a hand-to-mouth world of wretched plays, vitriolic reviewers, tyrannical audiences and capricious managements. His Lyceum *Hamlet* of 1874 virtually revived a dead dramatist, though the *Punch* critic of his *Othello* said that if there was one thing Shakespeare could not do, it was to write a tolerable play for 19th-century audiences. From then on, with the Lyceum under his management, Bram 'Dracula' Stoker as his secretary and Ellen Terry as leading lady, he became the apostle of lavish theatrical realism and the theatre itself, carefully decorated in the style of the Palazzo Madama, a temple of enormous and respectable illusion.

The Merchant of Venice featured gondoliers rowing along stage canals and crowds in St Mark's, from which Irving emerged as a shatteringly sympathetic Shylock. The entire last scene of *Richard III* was played inside the King's tent, with a view of the battlefield. Terry went off to a lunatic asylum to study the inmates in preparation for her first Ophelia. There were real trees and real lilies in the Capulets' garden, and Birnam Wood marched to Dunsinane across a heathery grouse-moor to music specially composed by Sullivan. The final triumph was a spectacular *Faust* adaptation, costing £15,000 (Irving as Mephistopheles, 'Nell' as Marguerite) with a genuine organ and peal of bells, grand transformation scenes, ladders of angels, views of old Nuremberg and lashings of old fustian.

Fundamental lack of sympathy with the period leads Mrs Bingham into rather too many ho-ho asides on Victorian mores, but she has otherwise risen gamely to the challenge of her subject, and taken care to alloy the monotony of Irving's success with

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a detailed account of his stormy private life. Invitations to Windsor to act Tennyson's *Becket* before the royal brood, American hero-worship, a knighthood and a DCL were offset by marriage to a prim Kensingtonian, whom he courageously and literally deserted in Kensington Gardens, when, apropos a recent triumph, she had snapped, 'Are you going on making a fool of yourself like this all your life?'. The long partnership with Ellen Terry, beginning as Irving stopped her from throwing herself off the Embankment in a first-night depression, was followed by the late bloom of Mrs Aria, a jolly Jewess, more of a cadenza than an aria in Irving's sexual career.

Irving finally collapsed on tour in Wolverhampton in 1905. By then, costume drama had given place to the well-made boudoir Ibsenisms of Pinero and Wilde. Shaw, who as a young man had admired in Irving the realistic acting style he sought for his own work, churlishly sent back his ticket to the funeral, saying, 'Literature alas has no place at his death, as it had no place in his life.' In one of the best theatrical biographies of recent years, Mrs Bingham, unsentimental and painstaking, convincingly argues the case for a life of monomaniacal devotion to a supremely ephemeral calling, and one which, for better or worse, had turned a job into a profession.

Max Beloff

For This Relief

The Hungry Mills by NORMAN LONGMATE
Temple Smith £7

Referring in a speech on 3 November 1862 to the cotton famine arising from the interruption in supplies caused by the American Civil War and the ensuing distress in the Lancashire cotton towns, Cobden declared: 'There has been nothing like it in the whole history of the world for its suddenness, for the impossibility of dealing with it.' Since Cobden's aim was to emphasise the need for funds to supplement the efforts of the Poor Law guardians, the degree of hyperbole is understandable.

The element of truth lies in the suddenness of the interruption of cotton supplies. Yet in 1857 the Cotton Supply Association had already been founded in Manchester to seek alternative sources of supply. The difficulty was that cotton from elsewhere was regarded as markedly inferior to what the southern States could supply, and it was only when the famine actually came that Indian cotton was imported on any large scale. The other remarkable feature of the situation was the degree to which the industry was concentrated in a single county and the extent to which a number of towns were almost wholly dependent upon it, so that unemployment on the scale now experienced also brought down into misery all the other local trades and the local shopkeepers.

On the other hand, in the nature of things the interruption could only be brief; the worst was over (in part thanks to blockade-running) before the end of the war and the restoration of normal trade. The problem it presented to the authorities and the national conscience was how to maintain a skilled and relatively affluent section of the working population. It was in the event nothing as severe as the catastrophe that had befallen Ireland during the 'great hunger' of the 1840s; there was no increase in mortality and hardly any emigration.

Compared to the treatment of the Irish famine, action was both prompter, more relevant and less encumbered by non-interventionist dogma. The charitable funds collected and administered by the formidable combination of Lord Derby and Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth were effective in relieving the worst of the distress; the public works initiated to provide employment did not do much numerically in that direction but did something to remedy the public squalor of early industrial Lancashire. The cotton operatives, reluctantly forced on to relief once their savings and possessions had gone, showed (with one brief and localised exception) great self-restraint and self-discipline. Crime did not increase; morality did not relax; well might Gladstone argue after the event that men such as these could not justly be denied the franchise. He did not suggest that the women had shown themselves even more deserving.

Mr Longmate's book deals with these events and their repercussions in national politics from a variety of approaches. While neither his scholarship nor his literary skill is on a par with those of the late Cecil Woodham Smith, he does contrive fairly successfully – aided with much direct quotation from the two main contemporary accounts of the famine and from a great deal of bad verse both in Lancashire dialect and in standard English – to convey something of the impact that the famine made on the districts affected and on humane observers. But he fights shy of analysing the problems that his own narrative brings to light. He tends in an irritating way to insert sardonic comments of his own which are an inadequate substitute for judgment.

It was argued by some contemporaries that the cotton capitalists were unwilling to take any responsibility for their former employees and that poorer parts of the country were raising sums for relief that could well have been provided in Lancashire itself. Against this view local spokesmen claimed that there were many instances of local generosity and that even with the relief funds available the rate burden at a time of slack trade was a heavy one. Mr Longmate states that the records of the relief operations were meticulously well-kept. If that is so, then it should be possible to give some statistical answer to the questions posed.

Again, it has been a powerfully entrenched belief that while the British upper classes were on the whole pro-Southern, the Lancashire working class – though the main sufferers through the Northern blockade – remained staunchly anti-slavery and hence pro-Northern. Mr Longmate reproduces recent American research to show that this was by no means the case; that Merseyside happily built blockade-runners and warships intended for the South; and that the cotton-towns, as reflected in local meetings and by their MPs and press, were keen that the Government should recognise the South and so bring nearer (as they thought) the end of the war. The evidence seems conclusive. Yet in a subsequent chapter Mr Longmate takes up the anti-slavery theme to argue that as soon as Lincoln's emancipation proclamation was issued, British opinion turned emphatically to the Northern side, now that it was rightly convinced that slavery was the only cause of the war. The difficulty is that when one looks at the dates many of the most striking Lancashire manifestations of sympathy with the Confederates came well after the emancipation proclamation, which would therefore appear to have had little impact upon the Lancashire working class. Once again, Mr Longmate does not try to consider his evidence as a whole.

Mr Longmate's impressionistic habits have the advantage, it is true, of calling attention to aspects of the scene that a more formal treatment might miss – the effect of religious divisions upon the organisation of relief in some towns, for instance; the curious episode of the schools provided to give occupation to the unemployed –

Andrew Motion

The Patient

From the white sanitorium this girl
takes to the veranda. It is midwinter,
and milky light lies low in the fields
where evening falls, stiffening puddles
and losing the dead flat map of hedges.

Nothing surprises her; not even those
red crescents which scare the horizon.
She has been years like this, naming
bombers hung east over the Humber,
and guessing what flames they leave
at play with visitors who never came.

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literacy for the males, housewifely crafts for the females; and the evidence it provides for the extent of illiteracy and/or the impact upon domestic habits of an exceptionally high level of female employment in normal times. But impressionism is not enough.

Of the standard work on the famine, that by W. O. Henderson, Mr Longmate writes that it is 'apparently intended for an academic audience'. One detects a slight note of disparagement. Yet with books intended for an academic audience one can be fairly confident that the facts themselves will be correct, and that the author will have given some time to the wider setting of the events with which he deals. One does not have this feeling where Mr Longmate is concerned. It is hard to feel happy about someone's treatment of the Indian aspect of the story when one finds that he believes the Council of India was a body sitting in India. The man who assaulted Sumner at his desk in the Senate was not a fellow-Senator but a member of the House of Representatives. It was neither of Lord Derby's sons who succeeded to the earldom but his grandson, the 17th earl, who was known as 'the uncrowned king of Lancashire'. The blockade-runner 'Captain Roberts' (Augustus Hobart-Hampden) did not at a later date 'hire himself out to break a blockade of the Greek ports by the rebellious Cretans'. It would have been odd if he had, since the Cretan rebels' object was union with Greece. What he did do was enter Turkish service to help put down the Cretan rebels, for which feat he earned the title of pasha. Twopence coloured rather than penny plain, Mr Longmate, by all means, but please do get it right.

This English

The line between inelegance and solecism is a hard one to draw – often because the business of rereading the suspect passage is simply too painful to bear. We feature two gruelling examples of this, plus two dud relative pronouns (nob and yob respectively). £3 for first entry, £2 for others printed. Paste entries on a postcard.

☐ Where he miscalculated was in his belief that the Communist Party would be compelled by its desire to escape from the ghetto and share power, by the Italian example and the general drift of Western Europe towards social democracy, to cling close to the Socialists. **Robin Smyth** Observer (Paul Drake)

☐ Status meant that when the novelist was old, and his mother older still, and suffering from rheumatism, their servant Agnes, old and bent double by the same ailment, had to toil upstairs with brass cans of water for the two of them, in her cap, apron and streamers. **Karl Miller** *Guardian* (Paul Brodetsky)

☐ True to the tradition of the Press whose work it recalls, it gives us no clue as to whom Mr Sutcliffe may be . . . **Rivers Scott** *Listener* (Mrs Kenneth MacIntyre)

☐ Miles is a bogey opponent for this strong Russian grandmaster, who Tony beat at Hastings 1975 and drew with at Bath 1973. **Leo Barden** *Guardian* (Don Elloy)

A. N. Wilson

No Offence

Property Of by ALICE HOFFMAN *Hutchinson* £4.25
Night Season by CHRISTIAAN BARNARD and SIEGFRIED STANDER *Hutchinson* £4.95
A Rude Awakening by BRIAN W. ALDISS *Weidenfeld* £4.50

Property Of, Alice Hoffman's first novel, is the self-consciously unliberated name adopted by the girl friends of 'The Orphans' – a gang of mildly elderly teenage hoodlums in New York. There is the delightful, diminutive Starry, permanently stoned on tequila and heroin, sleeping with them all; there is Irene, hanging on the arm of a Vietnam veteran, and so on. The heroine of the book, who falls in love with Mackay, the President of the Orphans, encounters some hostility from the other chicks at first, but she braves it out and puts up with life's hardships: the battles with the rival gang, the Pack, the indifference of Mackay's sexual performance when under the influence of heroin. She waits a whole six months for him when he is jailed for killing another thug, the Dolphin; she even stands by him when he is supplanted in the Presidency by the sinister, shaven-headed Tosh. But she finally walks out on him when his addiction becomes impossible to live with.

Despite the nature of the material, this is an oddly inoffensive novel, partly because the gang's code is described almost ritualistically. The Orphans are a sort of baby version of the mafiosi or the Chicago gangsters of the Twenties and Thirties. They fight hard, but they have standards; they go to their enemies' funerals, for instance. And their girls have to recognise that the hoodlums would not be so good in bed – or rather, on the back seats of Chevrolets – loved they not honour more.

Another reassuring thing is that the book shows the all-American institution of marriage to be stronger than any amount of drugs, blood, or corruption. No sooner has the heroine made a set at Mackay and moved into his apartment, than she is nagging him because he never takes her out, reminding him that *she* paid for the clean sheets on their bed, and trying to persuade him to dislike all his friends. They do not actually go through the ceremony, of course, but her final walk-out is as inevitable as the consummation of all good American marriages in the divorce courts.

Christiaan Barnard's novel is written in collaboration with Siegfried Stander, 'a fellow South African'. Stander did the writing, presumably, and the spare-parts merchant had the ideas. The tastelessness of the enterprise is not diminished by the quotations from the Psalms and Ecclesiastes which divide the book's various sections, nor by the face of the butcher himself, grinning conceitedly out from the back of the cover. It is the story of how a brilliant, handsome, oversexed and famous surgeon, fondling the breasts of his former mistress, discovers that she has cancer, and decides to keep her in ignorance of the fact; 250 pages later the surgeon lover switches off her life-support mechanism. There is a good deal of medical jargon to add 'authenticity':

> Her oesophagus had been so badly burnt that she could not even swallow her own saliva. The surgeons had decided that further attempts at dilation of the stricture would be dangerous, so he had been called on to do a feeding gastrostomy.

Of course, there is no closed shop as far as writing novels is concerned. But there seems little difference in Barnard's case between fiction and self-advertisement.

Perhaps I am particularly hostile to medical novels, having recently emerged from hospital myself. Some months ago, laid up in a ward full of wheezing cancer patients and chronic bronchitics, I was struck by the subjects to which they wanted to devote their final gasps. Nearly everyone reverted to the functions of the bowels and sex while on war service. Whispering after dark through their oxygen masks, they told of diarrhoea, wounds, erections, prostitutes and VD.

These things all come bursting out, as it were, in Brian Aldiss's *A Rude Awakening*. Told in the first person, the book chronicles the discreditable doings of Harry Stubbs, a name aptly suggesting unpleasantness of character and perpetual chain-smoking. The main flaw in this often clever book is that, while presenting the drunken antics of Stubbs (now a sergeant in Sumatra) in a realistic enough way to show that he is a mindless reprobate, it has no other voice but his in which to comment on things in general. Why should we accept his (of all people's) banal reflections on the political situation in the Far East in 1946?

And the obsession with whoring seems excessive. A quotation on the title page tells us what to expect:

> A man has missed something if he has never woken up in an anonymous bed beside a face he'll never see again, and if he has never left a brothel at dawn feeling like jumping off a bridge into the river out of sheer physical disgust with life.

Doubtless true. *A Rude Awakening* shows why the experience is distinctive, but not why it is one that a man could conceivably wish to have had. Aldiss is too fond of these dull tarts to think that some of his readers might find them boring.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Julian Barnes

Being Melv

Have you noticed how nice everyone is about Melvyn Bragg at the moment? How people look quite undisconcerted, even nostalgic, when you mention his name? There are, it seems to me, two reasons for this. The first is what is called the Forster effect. The more novels Forster didn't write, the more he was revered: readers felt at ease with him, felt that he could be consigned to a particular mental slot. When Melvyn was at his most visible, everyone was very fond of him, of course, but felt vaguely menaced by his ubiquity. *Read All About It, Second House*, that foray into *Tonight*: you never knew where he was going to come at you from next. He himself denied that he was on television that often (and would give you hourage statistics, if you weren't careful, to prove that he appeared less than Ludovic Kennedy); but all the same, it *felt* as if he was always on. You feared that one day he might decide to appear on television especially to tell everyone just how rarely he appeared on television.

But since his transfer to *The South Bank Show* (LWT), the Forster effect has really worked for him. Whether his decision to take the slot opposite *Match of the Day* was gutsy or just plain cunning, it's certainly made us appreciate him. We may not see him much, but we know he's over there, discussing socio-rock with Paul Gambaccini, and we appreciate him for it. We remember his panache, his excellent interviewing technique, his occasional capacity for firmness ('Do you think she's any good?' he actually asked significance-seeker Gambaccini this week, after the smug, world-hating Patti Smith had compared herself to Leonardo da Vinci, explaining, 'Rock and Roll is the highest house I can shoot all my work into'). The news that Melvyn's *Observer* column about television has now ended can only increase his fame.

The second reason for Melvyn's resurgent popularity is easier to identify. It's Ronald Harwood. If Melvyn had a hand in the appointment of his *RAAI* successor, how guileful it was of him to pick not just a lookalike, but an actor, someone capable of boning up on the finer points of Being Melv. There ought to be a BBC house rule about this sort of succession – something akin to the Deceased Wife's Sister Act (have you noticed, by the way, how Desmond Wilcox is turning into Michael Barrett? Watch out down there at *Nationwide*). For Ronnie has proved a disappointment. True, he looks like Melv; his roguish hair is sculpted by the same soft hands that moulded Melv's; he wears velvet with the same aplomb; he waves his hands around in the same irrelevant manner; and certainly the same words come out of his mouth ('Well, that's what we've been reading here; but what have they been reading in Leptis Magna? To find out, we went to the Crayfish Bookshop . . .'). But you know he isn't the real McCoy. Melv would not melt in your mouth; but Ronnie is the Margarine Man.

RAAI's main weakness has always been its combination of critical populism and social ambition: in other words, the belief that one well-known person's opinion about books is just as important as any other well-known person's. Joanna Lumley didn't like a certain book: Freddie Ayer did; now over to John Conteh to decide by a 2-1 verdict whether it's a good book or not. Bragg's reply to this criticism – what do you want? a panelful of literary editors? – certainly had some validity. But under Harwood the tendency to exclude people who actually know anything about books has increased. This week's critics were no better, no worse than usual: the presenter of *Woman's Hour*, whose reiterated epithet for Unity Mitford was 'naughty'; an architect-photographer with a keen if vague enthusiasm for fairy tales ('"There was an old king who had three sons" – perfect!'); and a 'writer' in a Hawaiian shirt with a winning aeroplane motif, who admitted that he'd never heard of Paul Theroux (his choice) until his pin fell on the name in the *RAAI* handout. A little ritual bowing to the Poet Laureate, and Ronnie rubber-wristed to its close a programme which has declined into little more than a publishers' sales outlet.

Easter hung about for an extra week at the BBC this year. At least, that's the only plausible reason why Derek Nimmo had three clerics on his final, giggly *Just a Nimmo* (BBC-2). They were humane, unserious, relaxed, risqué, even camp (why, one of them even made his plastic dog-collar from a Fairy liquid bottle) – in short, they were such easy-going liberal humanists that they would appal any serious atheist. No wonder so many of our countrymen are flocking to real religions, like Russian Orthodoxy. *Heaven On Earth* (BBC-1) pointed out that Orthodoxy obtains large numbers of converts each year without even trying; its other, adventitious revelation was that Orthodox congregations contain a high proportion of incredibly beautiful women. As the programme unrolled, these two features were gradually explained. Despite its theatricality (bearded priests in silk *Star Wars* wraparounds friskily yo-yo-ing their censers), Russian Orthodoxy is both down-to-earth and up-to-heaven. The physical resurrection of the body is its central tenet, and Easter, not Christmas, its central festival. 'I feel I am proclaiming the only real thing about history,' said one priest of the Resurrection. It is also a cheerful religion, soft on the pleasures of the senses. What better church for both the practical and the beautiful?

Havoc (ATV) is an erratically scheduled series with an unfailing appeal – the sight, week after week, of other people getting it in the neck in spectacular fashion. Every show offers a new disaster-form, illustrated with scary clips and interviews with survivors who always surprise and comfort one with their continuing normality: how come they escaped death so narrowly without all their hair falling out, without developing some horribly disfiguring tic, without even joining the Russian Orthodox church?

This week's programme, baldly subtitled 'Collapsing Bridges', contained two extraordinary clips: a grainy black-and-white sequence of the Vistula Bridge in Warsaw, with panicky soldiers pathetically throwing hand-grenades at the huge blocks of ice which were about to smash away the piles from beneath them; and an even weirder film of the fall of the Tacoma Bridge in San Francisco. Already known affectionately to the locals as 'Galloping Gertie' for its habit of fidgeting in the wind, this bridge

Kingsley Amis

Drinking Song

Look at old Morrison!
Isn't he wonderful?
Fit as a fiddle
  And tight as a tick;
Seventy-seven
And spouting his stories –
Just listen a minute
  And laugh yourself sick.

Same with the other chaps:
Bloody good company,
Never let anyone
  Drink on his own;
Out of your parish
Or widowed or derelict –
Once you're in here
  You're no longer alone.

Different for Weatherby,
Struck with incontinence,
Mute in his wheelchair
  And ready to go;
Different for Hooper,
Put back on the oxygen,
Breathing, but breathing
  Uncommonly slow.

Did what we could, of course,
While there was anything;
Best to remember 'em
  Not as they are,
But as they used to be,
Chattering, chaffing and . . .
You go and eat
  And I'll stay in the bar.

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suddenly found its central span going berserk on it, bucking and diving up and down, the roadway twisting and stretching like rubber (yet without the surface seeming to break). Afterwards Glenn Ford, who fronts *Havoc* with furrowed brow and obvious concern, let slip the news that, with the present allocation of resources, it will take 40 years to make all the bridges in America safe. A month ago this show made me decide never to live near the Ohio river; two weeks ago I gave up air travel; this week I gave up crossing bridges. Soon, no doubt, the series will get on to Great Cinema Disasters, Famous Food Poisonings, Misdirected Letter Bombs and Exploding TV Sets; then there'll be nothing left to do except climb into bed and lie there, listening to the metal fatigue eating away at the bed-legs.

Art - 1

John Spurling

Dropping Bricks

Carl Andre *Whitechapel Gallery*
The Bourgeois Paradise *Fischer Fine Art*
The Family of Darius Before Alexander *National Gallery*

Carl Andre – the Master of the Tate's Bricks – should not be mistaken for a con-man. For one thing, he lacks the light touch. He is an earnest and well-meaning artist who appears almost over-anxious not to con anybody. It is important to him that his sculptures should seem no more than they are: double layers of oatmeal-coloured bricks, rough pieces of timber or floor-coverings of flat metal plates (lead, aluminium, zinc, steel, copper, magnesium or chequerboard combinations). Andre wants to 'reveal the properties of the material' without imposing any properties on it and he rejects any sort of welding, joining or sticking process which might inhibit the freedom of his 'particles' (whether bricks, pieces of wood or metal) within their arrangements.

For another thing, he and other contemporary artists have finally demonstrated that the concept of the con does not apply to art, which can only be defined as anything a person chooses to put forward as art. This point granted, the question becomes, as Andre himself suggests, whether it is good art or bad art. Andre's can hardly be judged bad art, since its virtually raw materials are intrinsically pleasing and Andre's arrangements of them are purely mathematical without any programmatic or metaphysical pretensions. If you do not, then, enter the gallery in any spirit of contention, you are unlikely to be offended and may even leave it with a greater awareness of the ordinary materials around you – pavements, for instance, or the new carpets in the National Gallery, which are also oatmeal-coloured.

The snag is that unless you live next door to the Whitechapel Gallery the experience is too limited to be worth the journey. Unpretentiousness of this order is indistinguishable from tedium. 'What is beautiful in art,' says Andre, 'is not that someone is original but that someone can find a way of creating in the world the instance of his own temperament.' It may be presumed that Andre, who has spent time and trouble assembling these pieces, whereas we are only required to look at them or walk over them, has a higher boredom threshold than is normal, but otherwise his temperament is mainly concealed behind the excessive simplicity of the evidence. Unless, that is, we are allowed to adduce the exhibition's labels which do strike what is in the circumstances an enlivening note of pomposity. *Equivalent VIII*, for example – the Tate's bricks – is labelled 'New York 1966 (destroyed) New York 1969 (remade)', while *Inverted Tau* (two pieces of timber arranged to form an inverted T) and *Angle* (two timbers arranged to form an L) are both labelled 'New York 1960 (proposed) Minneapolis 1971 (made)'. Andre may not, after all, be entirely averse to being mistaken for a con-man.

The National Gallery recently acquired a portrait by Klimt from Fischer Fine Art. In an attempt to resurrect some others of those once-successful late 19th-century artists who suffered sudden neglect with the acceptance of Impressionism, Expressionism, etc. in the 20th century, Fischer's has now mounted an interesting if somewhat repellent show called 'The Bourgeois Paradise'. In effect it is a gallery-full of ghosts, there being nothing quite so dead as an artist whose exact instinct for the peculiar predilections of his time dooms him for ever to haunt that period. Vague scenes of myth or history, flaccid nudes, crepuscular vegetation and a strong undertow of sex and violence are the main ingredients, assembled most notably in Böcklin's *Der Kampf auf der Brücke III*. Here on a low wooden bridge naked youths with streaming fair hair and mounted on bare-back horses charge after several of their comrades who are already engaged in a rearing and collapsing pyramid with what seem to be mostly Roman opponents. Meanwhile in the icy water below several older Teutonic types in white shifts with knives between their teeth are preparing a covert flank-attack. The prevailing colour is a lurid orange. In spite of its superficial impressions of energy and heroic savagery, the painting is oddly languorous and dream-like and its centre of interest is the sado-masochistic embrace across the backs of two horses between a Moor with dagger upraised and the naked orange-haired youth, or perhaps Amazon, clasped between his thighs. *Kampf* it certainly is and, with the other mostly less successful pictures in the show, puts one in mind of that classically bad painter from Powell's *Music of Time*, Edgar Bosworth Deacon, whose romanticised versions of classical scenes recalling 'something given away with a Chirstmas Number, rather than the glories of Sunium's marbled steep', also achieved resuscitation in the last volume of the series.

Another character from Powell, the romantic alcoholic Stringham, is described as looking like the Alexander in Veronese's *The Family of Darius*. It remains arguable, though, which is Alexander and which his friend Hephaestion whom the mother of the defeated Darius embarrassingly mistook for Alexander when kneeling for clemency at his feet. The central figure's gesture towards his companion can be taken to mean either 'No, I'm Hephaestion, he's Alexander' or 'No, I'm Alexander, he's Hephaestion'. Goethe thought the central figure was Hephaestion, but Tiepolo took the opposite view, as does Powell and also, in his new booklet about the painting, the retiring Keeper of the National Gallery, Cecil Gould. The painting was acquired in 1857 after prolonged and delicate bargaining, of which Gould's booklet gives a detailed account, from an Italian nobleman. It is now on special display with a complete set of X-rays which show Veronese's compositional changes – chiefly to the architectural background. The X-rays themselves are neither very clear nor very interesting, but at least they provide an excuse for the National Gallery to draw attention to this astonishing masterpiece which 18th and 19th-century tourists went to Venice to see and which we may consider, at £13,650 (the first offer was £10,500), one of the best things we ever spent public money on.

Art - 2

Andrew Saint

Star Wares

Josiah Wedgwood *Science Museum until 24 September*

What distinguishes Wedgwood from the other inventor-manufacturer geniuses of the 18th-century Midlands who helped establish British industrial primacy, men such as Arkwright and Strutt, or Boulton and Watt? Perhaps above all, in the public mind at least, the elegance and artistry of his finished products. But these qualities have tended to confine his appeal. The steam engine, to judge from the howling multitude of schoolchildren that surges about Watt's great wheel and beam in the hall of the Science Museum, commands more popular reverence than ever. By contrast, Wedgwood's wares seem cool, frail and connoisseurish, the preserve of the saleroom rather than the classroom.

Tucked slyly away from juvenile marauders in an obscure corner of the same museum and penetrable only by entrance fee, the new Wedgwood exhibition is not going to destroy that image. But it does point up its partiality, by drawing attention towards Wedgwood's status as an experimental scientist, and by showing much of the 'useful ware' which he himself distinguished in production from the 'ornamental ware' that remains his foremost claim to fame.

There has been no forced attempt to impress the visitor that he is on technical territory; the connoisseur who strays over from the other side of Exhibition Road will find

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himself well catered for. Examples may be seen of all the 'ornamental' high jinks, the products and offshoots of Wedgwood's great partnership of 1768-80 with Thomas Bentley, upon whose artistic knowledge and contacts his fashionable successes so largely depended: the Portland Vase and 'Etruscan' reproductions, some stranded remnants of the vast 'Frog' dinner service executed in 1773-4 for Catherine the Great's palace of La Grenouillière, and many of the countless cameos, medallions, urns and reliefs that issued forth from Etruria to the admiration of Europe. There are also chessmen by the youthful Flaxman (whom Wedgwood at first found 'a most supreme coxcomb' but was broadminded enough to go on employing), paintings by Bentley's friend Joseph Wright of Derby, and a bas relief and portraits by Stubbs for whom Wedgwood made experimental tablets in enamel as a ground for some of his paintings. The enamel portraits of Josiah and his wife are specially vivid, setting forth the blunt features of the great manufacturer more eloquently than a better-known Reynolds, or indeed than Stubbs's own stiff family group of 1780. In that picture not a hint is offered that Wedgwood's right leg had, after troubling him from childhood, been amputated 12 years before – a chain of events which, by debarring the young potter from long sessions at the thrower's wheel, led him to plan as well as practise and so played its part in raising Staffordshire ceramics from mediocrity to world renown.

As a scientist, Wedgwood lacked the breadth of Watt or the theoretical ability of his closer friends Joseph Priestley and Erasmus Darwin, though his skills and experience proved valuable to all three (practice and theory were united in Erasmus and Josiah's mutual grandchild, Charles Darwin). He stood, for instance, on the fringe of the Lunar Society but was never a member. Better pots were the goal of all of his experiments, even when, as with the 'pyrometer' or high-temperature thermometer designed to gauge the heat of his kilns, his inventions had wider application. The basis for the whole Wedgwood revolution, as he himself expressed it, was his attempt to halt the decline of the English pottery trade by effecting 'some more solid improvement, as well in the *Body*, as the *Glazes*, the *Colours*, & the *Forms*, of the articles of our Manufacture'. Thousands of experimental pieces, many on view, testify to the thoroughness of these trials, ending in the production of the three great new 'bodies' which achieved lasting success, 'Queen's ware', 'Black Basalt', and above all 'Jasper'. In his investigations, Wedgwood sought out and tested many clays and 'fusible stones', the Derbyshire 'cawk' whose barium compounds were the critical element in Jasper, the Cornish clays from which true porcelain was first made in England, and even the Cherokee clay of South Carolina, of which he succeeded in acquiring only a single consignment. This was not for want of sympathy with native Americans. Politically, Wedgwood was an exemplary if unemphatic radical, a sympathiser with the American and French revolutions, a supporter of the Anti-Slavery Society and of parliamentary reform, and a lobbyist for better transport.

The other products of Wedgwood's scientific interests to occupy a special place in the show are his plain stoneware crucibles, retorts, mortars, pipes and other chemical apparatus. These were developed from the late 1770s for friends like Priestley and Watt, whom he supplied free of charge, but were later supplied for the market to apothecaries and druggists at large.

One complaint must be registered about an otherwise outstanding exhibition. Several of the showcases covering complicated subjects like the pyrometer, which require concentration to understand, are located impossibly close to a loud and banal film of the process of potting, supplied like so much else by the Wedgwood Company. To them, otherwise, best thanks are due.

Magazines

Frederic Raphael

Midrash

I was assured recently by a prominent British intellectual that the Jews had, after all, not had such a bad century. One has to take the rough with the smooth, he reminded me smoothly, and the Jews were actually rather ahead of the game, all things considered. I had been arguing that there was justice in the view that the holocaust – the murder, in other words, of some 6 million largely defenceless and, by any remotely decent standards, blameless people – was a moral catastrophe which made the Fall of Man appear, by contrast, not much more than a matter of cuts and bruises. This time, God had fallen. The Christian world, with all its affectations of unique moral ascendancy, could never be the same again. 'Nothing', the professor pointed out with first-year Logic in his voice, 'is ever going to be the same again.' It was not only the Jews who had been irretrievably stricken by the rise and son-of-Samsonian fall of the Nazis: the whole confident structure of European pre-war society and culture had been shattered. The Jews had actually got off comparatively lightly; their 'ways of thought' – he seemed to see Freud, Wittgenstein, Chomsky, Einstein, Lévi-Strauss and Marx all marching along with Saul Bellowing 'left, right, left' – now dominated American and hence Western intellectual life. What was I complaining about? The professor's Arab students – with whom he did not necessarily agree, nor on the other hand necessarily *dis*agree – considered that the West had behaved with scandalous favouritism by inserting the Jews where they were not wanted, and did not belong, so let me not serve any out of date IOUs on the Western conscience, thanks all the same.

Of course I quite saw his point (*et ego in Cantabrigia vivebam*, but rage of frustration rose – and was repressed, of course – in me. It was not, God knows, for my own sake that I was angry, nor out of a partisanship which refused to reckon with the sufferings of others, including those of the Arabs, but because I saw in this complacent positivism the very instance of a systematic shallowness, a lack of moral imagination of which I am often guilty myself. The fortunate – and I have never heard the midnight knock, never suffered any sort of significant privation, never fired a shot in anger, unless you count a blank loosed off at an Etonian who nicked my forage cap on a Field Day – are always inclined to find that, by and large, fair is pretty fair and bad luck is what happens to those without the wit to avoid it. Among Gentiles I am disposed to play the gadfly, but among Jews I ape the professor and sigh when folk with guttural accents tell me once more of what was lost in the holocaust.

The *Jewish Quarterly* sometimes makes me sigh too. Those articles devoted to *shtetel* life, those memoirs of old Lithuania and that account of the World Conference on Yiddish Culture hardly cause me to fling open the pages. Must I care who Janusz Korczak was? What is it to me that Abba Kovner was 'Poet, Partisan and Pioneer'? 'Where Have All The Folk Songs Gone?' Frankly, I don't give a damn. All the narrowness of my British education inclines me to say that these people with their unpronounceable names are as foreign to me as the tenets of the Koran, whatever they may hold. My professorial critic would probably find no less irksome the many pages devoted to the holocaust (they smack of bad losing), to the Jew as 'fighter in war and peace', to the rebuttal of ancient (and modern) canards and to the splitting of internecine hairs, many of them Hannah Arendt's. (The internal polemics of Jews make one wonder why they have ever needed other enemies.) If I sometimes think that Jacob Sonntag's magazine forgets that the Gentile world exists at all, I am rebutted by the generous breadth of his interests: from Maimonides to Chaim Soutine, from Stalinism to Mosley – whose Skidelsky biography was treated with a precise and forthright contempt sadly missing in the fancier press.

How is it that in a period when the snap judgment of the puff or the hatchet is all that space usually allows, Dr Sonntag contrives, four times a year, to assemble a handsome, well-printed and literate magazine of almost 60 pages, on good paper and lavish with half-tone illustrations? What other publication attempts so consistently a serious – rarely solemn – tone or, within so apparently restricted a province, sustains one's belief that important things are indeed important and that it is still possible to confront great issues with dignity and intelligence? Dr Sonntag operates from his own house in North London, he pays his contributors on a diminishing scale (little or nothing), he has a personality – he will, I hope, forgive my saying so – more persistent than seductive, but he allows nothing to undermine his sense of purpose. He insists on functioning as though conscience and conscientiousness were somehow of consequence. The past is redeemed by the only means at his command, an accurate respect for humanity and a vigilant assessment of what has been lost, and of what remains.

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What does? What is it to be a Jew today? Dr Sonntag dodges the snare of definitions by embracing whatever contributions present themselves, provided they meet his standards of literacy. The *Quarterly* maintains no party line; it simply accepts the affirmative nature of Jewish contradictions and so comes close, cumulatively, to what I believe is called a *Midrash,* a purposeful ragbag of analysis and discussion based on traditional texts. In the case of the *Quarterly,* the text is whatever seems relevant to Jewish historical, artistic and intellectual experience. Somehow, perhaps on account of its limited circulation and its resolutely literate tone, Dr Sonntag avoids the blinkered banalities of the *Jewish Chronicle.* (One remembers the possibly apocryphal story of the *JC*'s report on the International Cross Country Race which was headed: 'Goldstone Fourteenth'.) The *Jewish Quarterly* escapes parochialism because it insists, in an age of ideology and malice, on taking the broadest possible view from what may seem the narrowest of angles. Dr Sonntag is forever warning that the magazine's finances are in a parlous state. If it fails, yet another small voice in favour of tolerance and hostile to big-battalion smugness will be lost. Perhaps the Arabs could be persuaded to put some money into it.

Theatre

Benedict Nightingale

Going, Going

Lark Rise *Cottesloe*
Chicken Soup with Barley *Shaw*
Let the Good Stones Roll *Ambassadors*
The Travelling Music Show *Her Majesty's*

'Will you sit or will you promenade?' they asked at the gate, and, ever-conscientious in the cause of experiment, I naturally opted to stay upright. It was not an altogether wise decision. There we were, massed in the well of the Cottesloe, wondering what was expected of us and receiving no clear answer. We peered round our neighbours' necks as one half-visible stage yokel bawled across the auditorium at another, and we hopped out of the way of a pair of children, who had chosen to pelt dementedly through our midst. Then it was backs to the wall as actors dressed as harvesters plodded past in a line, sweeping their scythes no more than an inch or two from our huddled feet, and then once more and with caution into the middle, where the actresses were thumping away at some carpets with rare old recklessness. The idea was presumably to make us feel that we, too, were residents of the village of Lark Rise back in the smocked and bonnetted 1880s. As it turned out, it was more like being a member of a coach-party of time-travellers that had been disastrously overbooked. After half an hour of craning and pushing I grew tired of pretending I wasn't really there, and decided to join the wall-flowers watching from above. I recommend those following my footsteps to do the same.

There are rewards waiting for them, in spite of everything. Flora Thompson's original was a sort of sociological memoir, a detailed and loving record of a vanished Oxfordshire; and Keith Dewhurst, whose adaptation this is, hasn't attempted to trick it out with any story or plot. Indeed, his only concession to dramatic convention is to shape the book's scattered observation so that it all occurs within the span of a day. Off go the children to pick mushrooms at dawn, and down sit the men over their (no doubt) real ale at night. In between, the 'king of the mowers' is crowned with his flowered hat, a coster comes to sell fish and a 'cheapjack' to tantalise the women with a cartload of expensive china, the squire persuades a returning soldier to join his nigger minstrel troupe, the village idiot exposes himself to a village matron with a gleeful squawk of 'here be nuts', and, in the evening's most painful episode, an old man is led away to die in the workhouse. Not until the very end is unity of time flouted, and then only for a brief and pointed extract from the parish service of thanksgiving after the Great War. Many we've met have died, much we've seen has already been lost.

The play's languid tread can be disconcerting, especially when banalities are being bandied about. 'They be after mushrooms again?' 'Aye.' (Long Pause.) 'Them fields be filled with dew.' (Pause.) 'Aye.' But this is probably inevitable: a serenity of pace, a slowness of life, is one of the commodities whose disappearance is being mourned, along with a sense of community, a pride in manual skill, a lively rural language, and a good deal else. Bill Bryden, who directs, has done well to make the evening as absorbing as it indisputably is, and equally well to avoid succumbing to woozy nostalgia for an irrecoverable innocence. A 12-year-old girl walks three miles to get a job as maid, 15 hours a day for £2 10s. a year. An old man recalls having to sell his beloved fiddle in order to escape starvation. The conversation constantly veers to money, or rather the lack of it: the play's emphasis is much more strongly than the book's on poverty, hardship and the claims of Christian resignation. Michael Gough, Mary Miller, Brian Glover, Warren Clarke, Caroline Embling and the rest of Mr Bryden's cast evoke our rustic past affectionately, but also judiciously; and I don't think that even those of us who most hate lorry fumes and plastic tomatoes could be prevailed upon to take a one-way ticket back there.

One of the Shaw's chosen functions is to mount 'modern classics' or, more precisely, to discover which modern works merit that rather pompous label. I propose to wait until the other two parts of Arnold Wesker's trilogy have emerged from the theatre's lab before offering a considered assessment of its latest research project; but those who may be mooting a visit to *Chicken Soup* should be assured that it survives re-examination astonishingly well. Here are Wesker's familiar conflicts, the ideal versus the real, hope versus distillusion, translated into a passionate blend of family saga, social history and political debate; and all strongly acted, too. It leaves me with little stomach for the week's musicals, both of which have the great misfortune to be British. Need I say more?

All right, I need. I have had a mild interest in the Rolling Stones since that proud moment 12 years ago when I was chased round a Manchester theatre by a mob of girls screaming 'Brian': viz Jones, who later died of what the show at the Ambassadors suggests (though in the most reverential way) to be a combination of drugs and megalomania. That interest was dissipated by an evening spent being belaboured by their songs, which tend to substitute a repetitive energy for invention, and their pensées, which seem scarcely original: music comes from the gut and it's the gut that's important, innit; school's bad because they tell you what to do instead of letting you use your instincts; our parents fought in the war, didn't they, but our generation's the one wiv the troubles. There's now no avoiding the sad truth that the group's members are boorish and boring, its history a long, sullen shrug.

Conversely, the week somewhat reconciled me to toothy Bruce Forsyth, whose winking, nudging, naughty-knickers manner with his victims on TV had always left me boggling. At Her Majesty's his verbal goosing of the audience comes as a relief, because at least it lures him away from all those puffing, chugging songs by Bricusse and Newley, as well as from the weary pretence that he's actually a hard-up comedian fighting for his professional life in some tacky funhouse in Scunthorpe. It might have been better if the producers had shut down the stage completely and simply let

John Mole

Snowfall

It came late,
filling our garden,
feathering the gate,

and blown through the door
a few flakes'
reminiscent pallor

smudging your toes
then gone . . . ,
a surreptitious

trick of vanishing
as if two hearts
might still take wing.

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him gangle and leer his way round the auditorium. If the box-office languishes, they should certainly give that a try.

Films

John Coleman

Dancing in the Dark

Roseland (A) *The Screen on the Hill*
Telefon (A) *Ritz*
Cruel Passion (X) *ABCs Fulham and Edgware Roads*

James Ivory's brilliantly brittle new movie almost breaks the mould in which he has cast it: once again he has discovered a site – in this case, a New York dance-hall – and populated it. *Roseland*, through three anecdotes, haunts a ballroom. The first of its trio of stories is called 'The Waltz' and puts an elderly couple, May (Teresa Wright) and Stan (Lou Jacobi), on the floor. May sees things in mirrors, as the film is subsequently to do a great deal: her problem is the old one, here sweetly rendered, about our hearts being young and gay. The second story, 'The Hustle', deals in harder material, though with an eerie lightness. A pretty man, Russel (Christopher Walken), is involved with three women: he is a stunning portrait of the professional gigolo: he is only as good as his women, who are memorably danced through by Helen Gallagher, Joan Copeland, and by Geraldine Chaplin, giving the quiet performance of her life, all fine bones, strained-back hair and profile.

It is a significant strike for this film that Mr Ivory has got such extraordinary appearances out of the ladies. Where he could be said to strike out is in his last episode or excursion, 'The Peabody', where an extremely – and somehow painfully – maquillée older female citizen, Rosa (Lilia Skala), is given her head, overly. Chatting her skinny Roseland old-man boyfriend round the floor, talking greatly to camera, she should have been stopped.

The affair is, notwithstanding, effective. It has a tremendous location, a constantly interesting and interested director and a sterling team. Images – courtesy of Ernest Vincze – are startling bright, likely to settle Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's script is fairly steadily witty, as befits the occasion. It is an occasion, after all – after all its controlled hysteria, its piss-elegance: it is an exercise in nostalgia of note. About dancing feet, sad ladies and their squires, the lonely and the mildly lunatic. Mr Ivory is a past-maestro of such proceedings, sometimes at his best here: a re-visitor of palatial lost ground capable of taking the viewer on his *petit tour*. He has the gift of making everywhere a little India, tugging you into his dreams.

Don Siegel's *Telefon* veers near to being the strangest trick of the week. Extraordinarily well-photographed by Michael Butler and exceptionally ill-written by others, it displays many of the signs that are making cinema a dirty word in current circles. The plot, if it is related to anything, would have to do with a Russian-American imbroglio: a load of deep-hypnotised people of both sexes planted all over the States, waiting for the phone-call from Donald Pleasance that will trigger them into blowing things up or generally damaging property. Charles Bronson is the KGB fellow dispatched to America, during a détente situation, to sort this crap out. He has total recall, apart from being Charles Bronson. As usual, he sits under his multi-racial pate, being terribly stony. He is good at this. He'd better be.

Evidently an item with the title of *Cruel Passion* ought to be bad news. A tired spin-off from de Sade, it is – boring for masochism. We will not dwell on it any longer. Rather, spare a word for how handsome – intermittently – even this sick silliness is. They make it all look good, what with their advanced cameras and the like these days. Everything sharp, beautiful, and profoundly unseen, unfelt, unheard: unthought.

Weekend Competition

No 2509 **Set by Robert Baird**

I'm biding my time
For that's the kinda guy I'm

– wrote Ira Gershwin. Can you do us up to 10 lines of verse rhymed as outrageously as that? By 21 April.

Result of No 2506 **Set by Loser Lou**

We asked you to rewrite any of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in the style of Robert Lowell.

Report **by Fatboy**

One of our hardest comps for a long time. Even the great Tim Hopkins, after 119 consecutive entries, failed to show. He wrote to apologise. After some argument, we decided to accept his apology. But it had better not happen again. (The Kid wanted to burn up to Luton and whack Hopkins out right away. The eloquence and compassion of Little Keith, however, finally prevailed, and we all agreed that five prizeless years would probably be an adequate humiliation.) Six Newtons to those printed.

Strumming by Nantucket's shore
I saw a young girl,
Some Harvard sophomore, I'd guess,
Who stopped me with a smile
And said, 'Play it again, Sam,'
Then started to cry;
'You must tape that song,' she said,
'Or I shall die.'
The green tide flushed in
As we lay on the stones
In a sperm-haunted dream
By Ahab's bones.

STANLEY J. SHARPLESS

As I walk through each chewed up street
Down by the waterfront, neon-lit faces
Flicker their fears at me from deadbeat
Bars, grin meaninglessly, mumble dead curses;
In the beginning was the infant howling,
And here Mammon shackles them all; the ghetto negro,
The lecherous alumnus, the maimed veteran prowling
In hopes of a pepped-up teenage whore,
Da mihi castitatem! . . . synthesise a tortured vision
And a midnight prayer . . . may there come to pass
A forceps to abort this deformed constitution,
A hypodermic for the Pilgrim Fathers' hearse.

GERARD BENSON

Tiger going like a flaming suppository
Through the black anus of the night,
What was the Lord God thinking of when he made you predatory?
Did He think He had the blue-print right?
With what foul magma did He light your eyes?
Or was it a meteor from unearthly skies,
Flashing above the stinking pits of hell?
Did the Lord God make the lamb as well?
And when He forged your sinewy heart,
Was He diverted by your roars?
Did He think the lamb would take it all in good part,
Bowels spilling out pinkly between your jaws?

T. GRIFFITHS

My blood pumps disease
into my tired aging brain.
Madness spreads like the branches of trees,
in grey London in the rain.

I'm all right.
Really I'm fine. Slow walking
around in the rain might
soothe my ill spirit, like talking.

And all these poor kids
are in worse shape than me.
Everywhere prostitutes and chimney sweepers on the skids.
But I'm rich so I'm free.

Their scorched mapped-out lives
run like the mapped-out Thames river.
What weight do I carry? Death; ex-wives;
sailors and whales for ever and ever.

ROY KELLY

My mother's cousin Harriet had gone
To stay with great-aunt Mary at Cape Cod,
Daddy was still at sea and Uncle John
Addressed himself exclusively to God.
So I, a lonely boy of barely eight,
Had long, sad, summer days in which to think
Of men who had, by folly or ill fate,
Been swallowed by the sea or died of drink.
And after that tormented June in Maine
I've never found my peace of mind again:
The most depressing thoughts run through my head
Of Quaker Graveyards and the Union Dead.

ROBERT BAIRD

Those Mormon back-religionists have seemingly
Constructed tabernacles, prayerhouses . . .
And ripped the sward untowardly, carcinomae
In the petal-wrecked dust. I do not like
It. I look at the doors wearily, their bolts
Clamped. Even God is privacy, denial,
Admonitory strains . . . I am feeling tired today,
Delicate primroses die; they give me warning,
Flowers that were: they too can contract
Incurable diseases, even drink too much rain.
Lichen on gravestone cavorts gravely
While I lie bleeding to death from religion.

J. Y. WATSON

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Tony Miles

Chess

No 78 **Disturbing Spassky**

The 1978 match for the World Chess Championship will commence in July in Baguio City in the Philippines for a prize fund of half a million dollars.

It will be interesting to see if this match is as eventful as Korchnoy's last. I spoke to Spassky about that match in Yugoslavia recently. Like Korchnoy, he had the feeling that someone was trying to influence his thoughts and found it very difficult to sustain concentration. It was this anxiety, real or imaginary, which led him to play from his 'box' and analyse from the demonstration board.

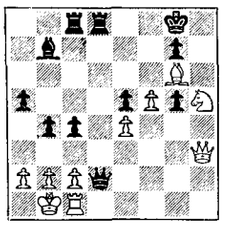
He also had a simple explanation for his mysterious visors. The stage lights, situated above the demonstration board, were very strong and hurt his eyes, so his wife made a cardboard visor to shield them. This also seems to explain Korchnoy's reference to his bloodshot eyes (see NS 24 February).

Spassky complained that four times during the match Korchnoy offered draws in clearly worse or lost positions. He was particularly annoyed during the final game when Korchnoy offered a draw via the arbiter – which had not previously been the practice – whilst he (Spassky) was thinking. The arbiter incorrectly disturbed Spassky to transmit the offer and in the remaining half dozen moves of the session he let the position slip and resigned in protest at the adjournment (when his position was by no means clearly lost and certainly not resignable).

This week's game is one of Spassky's better efforts from Bugojno.

White: B. Spassky **Black: B. Larsen**

1. P-K4, P-QB3; 2. P-Q4, P-Q4; 3. N-QB3, P x P; 4. N x P, B-B4; 5. N-N3, B-N3; 6. N-B3, N-Q2; 7. B-Q3. Earlier in the tournament against Karpov Larsen met the normal 7. P-KR4 by . . . P-KR4!? **7. . . .Q-R4ch?! 8. B-Q2, Q-B2; 9. B x B, RP x B; 10. Q-K2, P-K3; 11. N-R4, 0-0-0; 12. P-KN3, P-QB4?** Black is not sufficiently well developed to break open the centre, so it is no surprise that this advance rebounds. **13. B-B4, Q-B3; 14. 0-0-0, P-B5; 15. N-B3, N-R3; 16. P-Q5, P x P; 17. R x P, B-B4; 18. R(1)-Q1, P-B3; 19. R-Q6! B x R; 20. R x B, Q-B4; 21. R-Q5 Resigns.** (If . . .Q-B3; 22. N-N5).



Problem 78

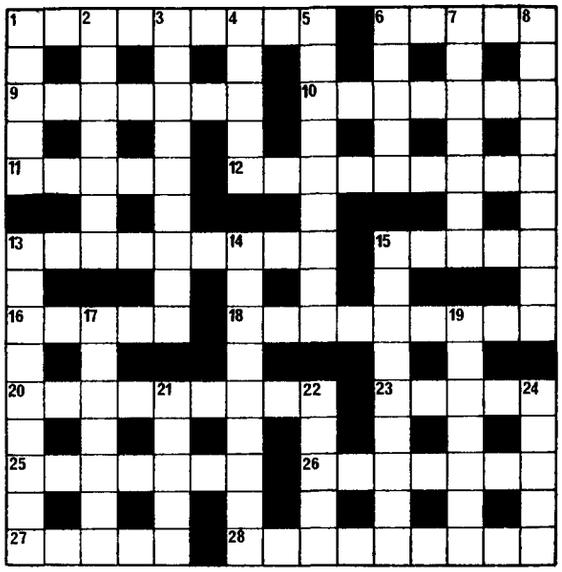
Black to play. How should the game go? Entries to me at the NEW STATESMAN postmarked not later than 19 April.

Solution to Problem 76

1. . . .N-K5ch! 2. P x N (2. K-K1, N x P wins more slowly) P x Pch; 3. K-K1, Q x Pch! Resigns. If 4. R x Q, R-R8ch; 5. B-B1, R(8) x Bch; 6. K-K2, R(2)-B7 mate.

Weekend Crossword 1258

PRIZES: Book tokens of £2 for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1258, New Statesman, Great Turnstile, London WC1V 7HJ, by first post 18 April.



ACROSS

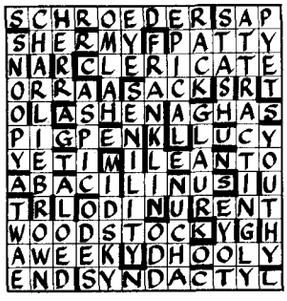
1. Apes girls freely in the mirror (9).
6. Eats about a thousand in low places (5).
9. A woman commanded about fifty and attacked with explosives (7).
10. Sedative a man put into meat (7).
11. Sudden action brings large number to resorts (5).
12. The Spenlow-Wilfer girl (9).
13. Possibility that Latin poet is translated (9).
15. Africans with first class degrees? (5).
16. American president takes his mother to heart (5).
18. 'More needs she the divine than the ——' (*Macbeth*) (9).
20. The proposer of the motion ran wild (9).
23. Stationed as in a plot (5).
25. In the back street are poor people needing work (7).
26. Poet would leave what is most serious unended (7).
27. Struggles to utter last words after anaesthetic (5).
28. Annoying person who makes people go into the mountains (9).

DOWN

1. Tiresome people, but if they lost heart they'd be favourites (5).
2. Refined, having a gentle disposition (7).
3. Make me sing about ancient sources of wealth (9).
4. Protected without a soft front being put on (5).
5. Always in a rush one after the other (9).
6. Brush and what to do with it (5).
7. They provide light cover (7).
8. A vital change in a child brings preservation (9).
13. Music which is no good for hill-billies? (9).
14. Restless as the devil before I enter a shelter (9).
15. Chief couple may be spliced (9).
17. Point fewer for those without purpose (7).
19. Possibly fly round a page to make examination (7).
21. Approaches putting one organ inside another (5).
22. Received as a name (5).
24. Prevent being couched in such wide terms (5).

SETSQUARE

Solution to Salamanca 4



Note: Title ('Vegetable Crackers') might translate as Peanuts — the Peanuts strip cartoon; unclued answers are names of ten of the characters.

Prizewinners to Salamanca 4

Sheila Noble (London W7)
D. P. Shenkin (London NW3)
Miss Pomeroy (Co. Down)

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Cont. from p. 480

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THE LONELINESS PROBLEM is worse for better-educated people: there are fewer of us; our standards are higher; contact is more difficult. Send 10p for news of a solution to Tally c/o Mailroom, 32 Newman Street, London W1P 3PE.

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NEW STATESMAN

Vol. 95 No. 2455

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Theatres

ALDWYCH THEATRE (Royal Shakespeare Company) 836 6404. Recorded bkg info 836 5332. Reduced price previews Shakespeare's 'Henry V'. 'Henry VI' Parts 1, 2, 3. See daily press for dates and times. RSC also at The Warehouse in Paul Thompson's 'The Lorenzaccio Story'. Strindberg's 'The Dance of Death' and John Ford's "'Tis Pity She's a Whore'. And at the Piccadilly Theatre in Peter Nichols' 'Privates on Parade'.

ALMOST FREE. 485 6224. Limited season only! Wolf Mankowitz's 'Samson & Delilah'. N.B. nightly 8 includes Suns. No show Fri.

NATIONAL THEATRE. 722 9301. 'The Cherry Orchard'. 'Plenty'. 'Lark Rise'. See daily press for dates and times or ring recorded infomation: 928 2256.

ROYAL COURT. 730 1745. Evgs 8, Sats 5 & 8.30 'Class Enemy' by Nigel Williams.

THEATRE ROYAL, WINDSOR. 95 61107. From Tues. 'The Luck of the Bodkins', adapted from the novel by P. G. Wodehouse by John Gould and David Wood. Music by John Gould.

ARTS THEATRE. 836 3334

Worth queuing for from breakfast time, Financial Times.

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Concert

AN ENJOYABLE EVENING of harpsichord music by Naomi Davidov. Works by Bach and Handel including Italian Concerto and Suite Harmonious Blacksmith, Purcell Room, Fri. 14 April 7.30 p.m. Tickets 85p to £1.60. From RFH, 928 3191.

Exhibition

GANYMED GALLERY, 11 Gt Turnstile, WC1. 405 9836. Lithographs by Moore, Whiteley, Lowry. 18 & 19 C. prints by Rowlandson, Gillray etc. List on request.

Auction

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUCTION of original cartoons, antiques and wine at Bonham's Montpelier St, Knightsbridge, Wednesday 12 April 7.15 (Reception with wine 6.30). Admission £2. Catalogues 50p. Phone 01-730 3529 or 584 9161.

Meetings

PUBLIC DEBATE

Will our energy last ?
The Rt Hon. James Callaghan MP will open a major Conference 'ENERGY TODAY AND TOMORROW'
at the Central Hall, Westminster on 12 April at 10.45 a.m.

Tickets £1 from 2 Cromwell Place SW7 2JG or at the door on the day between 9 and 10 a.m. Cheques payable to 'Energy Conference.'

NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE. 0602 45671. Sunday Seminar 9 April. 2 p.m. £1. An illustrated lecture by John Berger and Jean Mohr 'Images & Texts'.

UNITY THEATRE – ITS FUTURE. Special meeting for members and friends. Monday 10 April at Univ. of London Union, Malet St, WC1, 7.30 p.m. All welcome.

CENTRAL LONDON FABIAN SOCIETY. Wed. 12 April 7.30. A Speaker on 'The Future of Northern Ireland'. 5 Tavistock Place, WC1. All welcome. Collection.

THE BRITISH PSYCHOANALYTICAL Society are holding the fifteenth Ernest Jones Lecture entitled: 'Paradoxes of Irrationality', on Wednesday, 26 April 1978, at 8.15 p.m., at the University College Chemistry Auditorium, Christopher Ingold Laboratories, 20 Gordon Street, London WC1. The Speaker will be Professor Donald Davidson, Professor of Philosophy, University of Chicago. Admission free.

CAMPAIGN FOR LABOUR PARTY Democracy Conference. 'It does look, without a doubt, as if compromise proposals are being projected in order to protect MPs who are not prepared to carry out Constituency or Party policies' — Emlys Williams, President of South Wales Miners. We must organise to stop the NEC reneging on its pledge on automatic reselection for 1978! Working Conference: Saturday 20 May, 2-5 p.m. Ruskin College, Oxford. Speakers: Bob Wright (AUEW Asst. Gen. Sec. & Presidential candidate), John Miller (T&GWU National Officer), Dennis Skinner (MP Bolsover) & YOU. Credentials 50p from Terry Hunt, Basingstoke CLP, 19 Richmond Road, Basingstoke, Hants.

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CENTRAL LONDON FABIAN SOCIETY. Frank Judd, Minister of State Foreign & Commonwealth Office, will be Guest Speaker at the Annual Dinner to be held on Friday 21 April at the Hostaria Romana. Tickets £5 from Eva Stiasny, 107 Hamilton Terrace, NW8. Tel.: 01-286 5594.

FOCUS GROUP. Royal Commonwealth Society, 18 Northumberland Ave, London WC2, on 13 April at 6.30 p.m. A talk by David Lane, Chairman, Commission for Racial Equality, entitled 'Race Relations: Progress & Prospects'. Admission 30p for non-RCS members.

YOUNG SOCIALISTS. Special showing of film 'The Palestinian' (Vanessa Redgrave Productions), at 18th YS Annual Conference, 8-9 April, Blackpool. 6 o'clock, Sat. Opera House foyer, Winter Gardens, Blackpool. Tickets: £1.50/50p to delegates. Inquiries: YS, 21b Old Town, SW4. 01-622 7029.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE, Blind Lane, Bourne End, Bucks: Sun. 9 April Swami Bhavyananda on 'The Gospel of Divine Love' at 4 p.m. All welc. Vedanta mag. 50p.

THEOSOPHY. Informal Forum on Basic Theosophy, Sun. 9 April, 8 p.m. All welcome. S.a.e. free pamphlet, talks programme, booklist. ULT, 62 Queen's Gardens, London W2.

An Introduction to BUDDHISM
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57 Farringdon Road, EC1.
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For further details apply to the Secretary, Postgraduate School of Yugoslav Studies, University of Bradford, West Yorkshire BD7 1DP.

Closing date for applications of those eligible for SSRC awards (normally British nationals with Upper Second degrees, but those about to graduate can apply) – 1 May 1978. For other applicants – 1 July 1978.

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THE MUSLIM INSTITUTE

The **MUSLIM INSTITUTE** is arranging an eight-week course in 'The Political Thought of Islam' between May and July (exact dates to be announced later). The course will be given by Dr Tayyab Zain Al-Abdin of the University of Khartoum, Sudan and will present the political thought as derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. The course will also review the writings of such thinkers as Jamaluddin Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Abdul Ala Maududi, Hasan Al-Banna and Syed Qutb. The course will suit those in higher education but is not exclusively for students.

The fee is £15 for students and £25 for others. In a few cases the **MUSLIM INSTITUTE TRUST** will consider making grants to cover the fee. The venue will be the **MUSLIM INSTITUTE'S** office near University College, London. For further details please send s.a.e. to:

Dr M. Ghayasuddin, The Muslim Institute, 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1 0DS.

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